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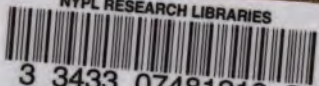
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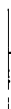
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BY

CARRIE GOLDSMITH CHILDS

AUTHOR OF "AND THE SWORD FELL."

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LOST LINEAGE.

CHAPTER I.

ONLY an old farmhouse. Yet who sanctions our right to say only this or only that of anything connected with the history of man? It was only a kite and key that lured the untamed lightning from the lowering skies; only the steam from a boiling tea-kettle that held enchanted in its misty vapors the picture of man's proudest achievement upon a thousand seas; only a manger that cradled the embodiment of a mighty principle of love that has shaken the earth to its very foundation and linked again the broken chain 'twixt earth and heaven. Only an old farmhouse, yet nature lends herself generously to the peculiar fashion of its weather-beaten face and lonely aspect, breathes the spirit of its present decay, and murmurs suggestions of its past pride and faded glories.

It is the last of May. No other month so nestles this ancient landmark in her lap of luxury, and presses its rugged old head against her bosom, white with the blossoms of the coming harvest; for the gaunt outlines of its chimneys melt into that paradise of May's making,—an exuberant apple-orchard, and the trees are even now shaking their huge bouquets in the face of the halting twilight, while exhaling a

passionate flood of subtlest perfume which he knows not whether to flee or welcome.

Below the house, which stands on a gently sloping knoll, wanders a timid little brook. To the ears of the children who once romped in the old farmhouse, it sang a boisterous gleeful measure, and laughed and gurgled with them in their play ; but in these long years of loneliness its heart has waxed old and heavy, and its voice murmurs out its melody in the far-off tones of some white-haired grand-dame, rocking, dreaming, and crooning by her deserted fireside. Its path, so long followed, has sunk deep into the moist earth, and the gleam of its passage is like a flash-light caught here and there among the tall grasses.

Away up on the hill behind the house, behind the snow-capped apple-orchard, two solitary chestnut trees rear their shapely heads. They stand straight, grim, and imposing, sharply silhouetted against the sky just streaked with the last rose-tints of the departing day.

So stately and tall they stand that the children in the old farmhouse used to call them the sentinels, and still relate to their children how, at the approach of a sudden shower, the wise old sentinels would bend closer together and whisper for a moment in anxious suspense, then, as if in perfect concord of opinion, they would beckon wildly with their massive heads and toss their giant arms in frantic warning of the darkening sky ; also, how the naughty children would still linger for a little while and watch the furious shower rushing upon them, while the faithful sentinels, growing more and more frenzied, tried to beat back the storm ; how the big rude wind lashed against them, then bent their proud heads and swayed their stalwart bodies in the unequal struggle, afterward breaking away with a loud roar, half of

malice, half of mischief, to fling the first big drops of the swelling storm-cloud full in the daring, childish faces ; how, at that challenge, they all fled like cowards, like chickens scampering to the safety of their mother's wing, to the shelter of the wide old farmhouse.

The old sentinels still stand, still guard with jealous care the slow decay of the long-served home, but they too have suffered in their service ; their sinews, like the heart of the wandering brook, have waxed old and weak : one has lost an arm, torn from its socket by his old enemy, the wind ; the other has a deep white scar scathing his breast, dealt by the arch-fiend, Lightning.

But the twilight has at last yielded to the narcotic perfumes of the coquetting orchard, and the sun has long since called his last attendant from the sky ; the moon mounts up in the eastern heavens clearing the circle of the horizon with boundless ease and mysterious swiftness, up, up, it glides, swinging far out from its background of quiet gray and its canopy of fleecy clouds, till it hangs suspended over the eastern hill beyond the brook, seeming for the time strangely near and altogether a thing of earth. But it only pauses a moment to glance with bloated indifference at the white faces of the headstones in the old family burying-ground, essaying just the glimmer of a cynical smile as it notes how even they have grown lonely, standing proudly apart, and now lean toward each other in unkempt but sympathetic confusion. Now it journeys on, up, up, up,—till in the glory of its passage it remembers no more its earthward attraction, and sinks back into the hollow firmament to lose itself once more in its drapery of fleecy clouds.

But the brook ? Has it revealed the secret of its dull heart and joyless music ? Look ! it has spread a veil of gray mist

between itself and the retreating moon. All along the line of its journey the gauzy drapery floats out behind. The air is damp and tastes of salty tears. A hushed stillness reigns, but some hidden zephyr toys with the floating veil, gently spreads it, lifts it, rolls it, and floats it out again, as if to examine its transient, unearthly beauty.

The old house, ungainly, rude and irregular in form and outline, its vine-covered shoulders stooping with age, its face grim and careworn, stands like some old giant petrified by the lapse of ages.

Now, about this isolated place, the darkness draws closer its somber folds, while the little brook, like a miniature river Lethe, divides it from the world on the one side, and the tall hill, drawing the horizon down upon its shoulders, shuts it in upon the other.

All nature whispers to the old patriarch, Sleep on, sleep on.

Suddenly, without sound or warning, a light flashes from a narrow dormer window, as if the ancient sleeper, startled, had opened one eye wide, in the fashion of a trusty watch-dog; and into this waiting body of nature flies the spirit,—for “Nature is but a form till man appears as interpreter,”—and surely human life is at last discovered upon this scene where all seemed so deserted.

A faint gleam appears in another window, whereat the sleeper grows convinced that he must keep both eyes open, and shake off something of his lethargy. A shadowy form flits across the rays of light, and it becomes evident that either some one has slipped quietly into this long-deserted domicile, or the former inhabitants have been enchanted and are but now shaking off their untimely slumbers. A quivering suspense is in the air as there steals upon the ear

the unwonted echo of a horse's hoofs striking the hard ground. The sound comes nearer and nearer, rings louder and louder, till suddenly the floating veil of the murmuring brook is torn in twain and at last the outside world breaks in. Two men in a buggy are rapidly approaching.

There is no hostler to receive the reins, and the driver does not pull up until the shelter of the old carriage-house is reached. As the strangers emerge again from its protective shadow, and move slowly toward the house, we have opportunity to satisfy our curiosity in regard to them.

We note that one is tall and gaunt; there is evidence of strict tension in all his muscles; his head sits stiff and firm upon his shoulders; his arms hang down straight by his sides, with no easy and natural swing; his feet fall with a heavy stroke of the heel in his measured and exact tread. The other, and evidently younger man, is somewhat shorter and stouter; there is that about him which tells us his frame is well-knit, and his muscles well-developed, but responsive to an erratic will; he has a quick, anxious way of glancing about him and his movements and gestures are eloquent of nervous impulse and mental unrest. It is too dark to scan their faces closely, and as they stop under the shadow of the porch and converse in earnest but subdued tones, we must be content to learn what we can of them through the following conversation.

The young man was the first to speak. Leaning up against a supporting post and pulling at a long grapevine tendril which reached out to him from an arbor close by, he began:

"Well, sir, what is it now? I'm not one to be consumed by curiosity. Some experience with you has taught me to bridle my inquisitiveness and hold my tongue,—but I sup-

pose I'm to have the reward of my patience now, and I must confess the sooner my work's done and I'm out of this God-forsaken graveyard, the better I shall like it. Ugh! I swear it smells of decayed houses and forgotten funerals. What delusive fiend ever lures people to settle down in these cursed lonely farmhouses!"

"Nonsense, Links!" replied his companion who stood over him with folded arms and the attitude of a man who never lets go of himself—"you've never lived in the country, that's all. You poor devils that are born and bred in the city get your ears so full of noise that they fairly ache when they're once emptied out, like the arms of a man who's just thrown down a heavy load. I was born and brought up here, and some mawkish sentiment has made me keep the old place. I guess likely I'll be willing enough to part with it after to-night," he added, a sinister gleam passing over his face.

The younger man made no reply, and his companion, after a pause, in which he cleared his throat of an imaginary obstruction and shifted his weight from one foot to the other, said slowly, "You've hung out your shingle and are a full-fledged doctor by this time, I suppose, Links?"

"Full-fledged and plucked!" responded Links, kicking the soft earth with his toe. "Mighty slim chance for a beginner these days. It's the old story of hanging out your sign and starving for the want of a patient. The drug-store looks a palace by comparison—with all due respect to your good intentions, Mr. Burbank."

"I don't think you'll escape earning your bread by the sweat of your brow, Adam,—if you'll excuse my quoting Scripture,—paradise can't last forever with you any more than it did with the first Adam. Hang to it like grim death,

and like grim death you'll conquer, has been my experience ; as to that, I'd hang to it in the very face of failure if it was only to test the caliber of my muscles," declared Mr. Burbank with a setting of the jaw, while a second sinister gleam flitted across his countenance.

"Well," said Links, resignedly, "I realize I'm in for it. But this doesn't explain my errand here to-night."

"No," responded his companion, "and making a long story short—I have a patient here for you."

"Well, that's a piece of news ! I had an idea this old place had been deserted for years," said the doctor.

"So it has, so it has," replied Mr. Burbank, lifting his eyes and gazing fixedly into the young man's face. "The truth is, Adam—my daughter is here !"

Adam gave a sudden start, the vine he was pulling sprang back to its place, and a quick thrusting forward of the chin gave him the attitude of a lynx at bay.

His companion was immediately on the defensive. Folding his arms tighter across his breast, he met the searching gaze confronting him with unflinching steadiness. There was a long pause.

"Well !" said Adam, breathing hard.

"I want you !" said Burbank, without changing a line of his grim face or moving a muscle of his body.

"So, then, does the devil !" muttered Adam bitterly, with a gesture half of recklessness, half of loathing.

"Dispense with facetious remarks," commanded the older man, assuming the tone and manner of a superior to his officer. "I'm a man of few words. I wish merely to remind you of the benefits you've received at my hands. I have taken you from the street, clothed, fed, and educated you. I have made you what you are, I am able to make

you all that you will be. So far I have asked little in return, but to-night—I want you.”

“I have always known you would sometime want me—and in the night. Pure benevolence is not of your type. As you make your bed, so must you lie in it,—as others make it, so too must you lie in it. With the assistance of your precept and example, I trust I have educated myself up to the times when you would want me—in the night—and here I am.”

“Good, we understand each other ! There will be a child born in this house to-night. It will not be a living child. Do you comprehend ? ”

“Exactly ! ” responded Adam with a sneer and shudder.

“Every attention will be given the mother, there is no one about but an old nurse with no wits to spare. You will manage it ? ”

“Perfectly ! May I ask this natural father and prospective grandfather if his son-in law is living ? ”

“Have a care, Adam,” returned Burbank with lowering eyebrows. “You may *ask* what you choose, it is well for your curiosity that I choose to answer. Happily for himself, Carlyle no longer cumbers the earth. My daughter will marry the man I picked out for her. She will learn how useless it is to defy me, as others have—as you will.”

“He is twice armed who is warned before,” said Adam coldly. “There is no slave like the dependent—no bonds like the bonds of obligation.”

“True ! You understand yourself ! I have never yet mistaken a fool for a wise man,” was the grim reply. “One is not so sure of knaves ; but over a man with his full allowance of brain—which is another name for ripe self-

interest—it is possible to set a watch. I trust I have not wearied you with words. Walk in.”

Burbank pushed open the door which had settled on its sill, and creaked at the hinges.

The room into which Adam Links was ushered had been the living apartment when the old farmhouse consisted of nothing but a tiny stone building containing one living room with two bedrooms above and a cellar below. The ceiling was low. One side of the room was taken up by a wide fireplace in which one could stand and gaze up the black-throated chimney into the shifting sky. The windows were patchworked with tiny panes of glass. There was a smell of mould hanging about the place.

This little stone building formed but a very small part of the house at this time, for, as the family fortunes had grown more favorable, and the family tree had put forth branches, irregular frame additions were put up so that the little stone hut, with its rich covering of climbing rose-vines, now stood back into the angle between two more pretentious wooden structures. The intricacies of architectural design had never bothered the head of the financier of the family fortunes, and, being a man of ingenuity, he had “drawed his own plans;” so it was a matter of little moment that his family had to go a good stone’s throw to get down cellar from the kitchen, or were obliged to go out of doors to reach other parts of the house; neither was it to be wondered at that a stranger, in his quest for certain rooms, found the old house something of a Chinese puzzle.

Adam was given a small cane-bottomed chair in front of the fireplace. The room was dimly lighted by a tallow candle which threw a fitful gleam over his dark face.

As he sits there, let us look at him.

The profile cut by the pale light is by no means unpleasant. The face is somewhat short, the chin slightly protruding, the lips mobile almost to fickleness. The eye, under the high curved brow, is gray, kindly, if not almost gentle in expression; the nose is shapely, and though the outline of the face is somewhat marred by the too sharp retreat of the line of the forehead, there is plenty of fullness directly above the eyes, and the curve of the head, if rather deficient in evidence of the moral and religious sentiments, is far from unsymmetrical.

There is no expression of settled hardness upon the face, as it appears in its present position, and it gives the impression of a man about twenty-two years of age.

After Mr. Burbank had seated his visitor he excused himself from the room. As the door closed behind him, the man in the chair half rose and cast an anxious glance about him as though he longed to escape from his forced position, but, as if quickly convinced of the futility of attempts to flee the thralldom of his patron's tyrannical will, he sank back into his chair and waited in sullen silence.

By and by he rose and began to pace back and forth in front of the cold fireplace. As he turns the other side of his face to the light in his gyration, the effect, though not at first understood, is almost startling. The whole expression of that opposite profile is sinister. We are first lost in slow amazement, then we begin to see that the left eyebrow points slightly downward to the nose and protrudes over the eye, which is deeper set and smaller than its fellow; the left half of the upper lip has a scornful curve and a sinister tightening of the muscles at the corner; the left nostril is thinner, shorter, and more tense. But these physical differences are slight, and might escape the eye of a superficial

observer. The double expression in the face is subtle, fleeting, indefinable, yet we never lose consciousness of the fact that it is there. It is as though two spirits, one good, one evil, were warring for the final mastery.

The man paced slowly back and forth, back and forth, unmindful of the lapse of time. But his host was long delayed, and presently the candle, burned to the socket, gave one last flickering gleam and went out, leaving the restless occupant of the mouldy-smelling room in sudden darkness. With a muttered imprecation he groped for his chair and sat down. Memory, which ever craves a dark and quiet hour like this, unrolled her long scroll before his eyes, now shrouded from all outward impressions.

He thought of those first years when he had wandered the streets by day and skulked by night, picking up an odd job or a night's lodging where best he could. He recalled his first impressions of the quiet, keen-eyed man who had given him various little commissions to execute and watched his performance of those commissions with such astute concern. He had almost worshiped him then, for his seeming interest, and there had grown up in his breast a kind of dumb, dog-like loyalty for his patron. One day a sweet young girl of something less than his own age appeared at her father's office. He, only a street waif, had regarded her with awe and a far-off reverence.—Before these visits were many times repeated, he saw that she was fearful and timid in her father's presence, shrinking at his voice of command and the penetrating glance of his searching eyes. A few harsh words from father to daughter had caused the first wavering of his boyish loyalty.—But who would not take up the cudgels, though it were against his guardian angel, in such a cause!

He recalled how, as perception matured, he began to struggle with the conviction that he was being used as a tool to accomplish shady deeds; as a skeleton key to open various doors otherwise impervious to respectability.

Under this cloud he had grown up. For the past two years he had seen less and less of the young girl to whom he was dumbly loyal. But he had heard of her love for an obscure, though worthy young man, who occasionally crossed his path. Against this intimacy, it was well known that Burbank directed his fiercest opposition. He was determined that his daughter should marry the man he had chosen for her—one who was wealthy and of proud family.

Recently it had been given out that Burbank had sent his daughter to Europe for her health, but the dependent, Adam Links, knew better. He had been taken into the secret. The girl had made a clandestine marriage with her lover, and, that fact having been discovered, was now in some safe retreat under her father's jealous but unscrupulous care.

Adam started out of his reverie as it flowed quietly out of the dim recesses of the past and touched the shore of the living present. This, then, was the safe retreat. The young husband was dead, if his informer were to be trusted—and Adam felt that he had told the truth. Thus the natural protector of the helpless young wife was the iron-willed tyrant who had summoned him, Adam Links, to such a deed. He wiped the dampness from his brow and shuddered as if from cold. His very soul was saturated with the darkness and the death-like stillness of the place.

Mr. Burbank now appeared with a few words of apology for his carelessness—for thus do we beg forgiveness for a thoughtless mistake while in the very act of wantonly thrusting our neighbor's soul into a very pit of crime. Adam stag-

gered as he rose to obey the summons to his patient's room, but he uttered not a word.

* * * * *

Two hours had crept by, and it was past midnight. Suddenly the sharp cry of a new-born infant pierced through the thin partitions of the little bedroom. At the sound, a tall, gaunt man standing in the adjoining room, with folded arms, knitted brows, and close-set lips, turned pale as death, gnashed his teeth, and dug his nails into his palms, muttering fiercely under his breath, "Curse him! has he failed me!" But the cry was not repeated, and gradually the tense nerves of Mr. Burbank's face relaxed, giving place to an expression of cunning triumph, which in turn disappeared to give countenance to Satan's own mask of placid self-justification.

Mr. Burbank would not have soiled his conscience, much less risked his neck, by being a witness to any unfortunate denouement in the execution of his plans; and he was, therefore, subjected to some anxiety as to the sagacity of his tool, not to mention the uneasiness excited by its too keen edge lying so near his own throat. But Mr. Burbank was a philosopher in that he preferred to use a sharp instrument rather than a dull one, even though it required handling with care. He trusted much to his own nerve and experience. Meanwhile, he had observed with satisfaction that the voluble old nurse had been sent from the room on some pretense, so that she was not present at the critical moment in which that unexpected, and uncalled-for cry was heard.

After waiting some time in deep suspense, Mr. Burbank saw the nurse slip back into the room, and he now considered it altogether proper and safe for him to make inquiries. He

went to the door and knocked. After a brief pause, his rap was responded to by the nurse who, in keeping with her usual manner, nodded, winked, and grimaced, as if birth were too common a thing with her to arouse anything but satisfaction in her own peculiar vocation. "Oh, yes, doin' very well," she said, "all doin' very well! Patient ain't come out of her chlor' form yet. 'Where's the doctor?' Oh, he ain't with you then! I s'pose he's just stepped out for a minute or two on some intention or other." Then she closed the door.

Mr. Burbank ventured to light a new candle now and repair to the first floor. When the nurse, listening behind the closed door, heard his heavy footsteps descending the steep stairs, she suddenly dropped down on the floor behind the tall foot-board of the bed, and throwing her apron over her head, there escaped from her ample chest a series of aspirated gulps, gurgles, snorts, and ha-ha's. She bent herself almost double, rocked to and fro, dug her elbows into her well-cushioned ribs, and shook herself from side to side in her vulgar merriment. "Where's the doctor! as if Polly Halsey didn't know the old man and the crooked-faced doctor was up to some 'shenanegan,' an' me a-seein' him scoot off down the dark hall with the baby under his arm. If it ain't the funniest thing, that that young fool thought I was goin' to be sent downstairs right in the middle of my right biz'ness. I knowed that old man was a-settin' some devil's egg when I fust come here. Just to think that them fools thought Polly Halsey wouldn't be round to see if anythin' hatched! 'Tain't no harm to the young lady, poor thing, she don't want the young one anyway if her man's dead and gone 'fore it's born. She'll get 'nother one twiced better 'thout a baby than with one.

'Tain't nothin' but just too good that they thought Polly Halsey wouldn't be round to see what they was up to. 'Where's the doctor?' Well that's a good one for Polly to get off—an' me that never sees a joke—I'll tell Halsey 'bout that. Mighty handy thing for the doctor, that little garret door was. Queer I shouldn't know the old man wouldn't have a poor-folk's nurse like me if he didn't have somethin' to keep to himself. 'Where's the doctor?' ha, ha, ha!"

Where is the doctor, reader? Perhaps under the starlit skies seeking to gain strength from their unfading and eternal glory, after this struggle with human suffering and this fight for human perpetuation. Perhaps seeking relief in contemplation of the painless, joyous fruiting of the orchard. And where is the child?

That one shrill infant's cry had unnerved the doctor. It should never have been. He never meant that it should be. But somehow, his fingers had refused to do the deed; he felt that they were upon the unconscious mother's throat, and they were paralyzed with a pitiful tenderness.

"Where is the doctor?" A cold dampness was on his forehead, he seized the bundle of infant and blanket, looked wildly about the room, opened the door, and sped noiselessly down a narrow passage that seemed to connect with another part of the rambling old house. He had no thought except to get out of sight and hearing of everybody, everything—himself most of all. He spied a narrow door, like a closet. He gave it a vigorous push and almost fell head foremost. Hastily recovering his balance he found himself in a spacious garret lighted only by two small, high windows, at one of which the moon, now but a ghost of its former red splendor, peers cautiously in. Great masses of shadow lurk in

the corners, the rafters gleam white like the bleached ribs of a skeleton. Shapeless bundles, boxes, and pieces of furniture lie heaped together. Something like an old canopied bed looms white in a far off-corner. The haunted man makes toward it, his fingers again seeking the tiny throat hidden somewhere in the bundle clutched in his quivering grasp. The boards of the bare floor creak dismally beneath his tread. Two, three steps forward, when clang! clang! clang! from an opposite corner breaks a hoarse muffled alarm. What dead thing had come to life from this tomb of midnight shadows! Two steps more—and a second hoarse warning tears itself from the stifled throat—clang! clang! clang! Another desperate step—he tosses the shapeless bundle upon the bed, leaps across the floor, fumbles blindly, madly, for the door, and stumbles with a gasp into the narrow passage.

His brain is in a whirl. The decisive moment of his life has come, but his thoughts are in a chaos of excitement; he does not recognize its advent. So far, the sea of Fate has borne him upon its bosom whithersoever it would. He has placed no strong, determined hand upon the helm, he has been all but content to drift with the tide. Now he awakes to find himself among the breakers. The ship is going to pieces. Hopes, fears, ambitions, responsibilities, duties, float about him. His one thought is to escape out of the treacherous flood. Whatever is conserved to him from the wreckage must drift ashore on the morrow.

He gathers himself together—gives one quick, anxious thought to his patient—pauses—grows cold at the mere thought of the child's cry that at any moment may ring through the rafters of the haunted garret—starts—then glides silently down the long, narrow passage, down the steep

stairs, lifts the creaking door with a shudder of apprehension—and is safe. A few minutes more and Mr. Burbank, in his turn pondering and planning by the cheerless fireplace, starts up, with an oath, to hear the furious clatter of wheels and horse's hoofs dying away in the distance.

CHAPTER II.

ADAM LINKS's thoughts were still in a state of chaos when he reached the top of the eastern hill overlooking the farmhouse. It was above this hill that the rising moon, now far distant toward the western horizon, had paused to contemplate the old burying-ground. A moment more, and the scene of the past few hours would be blotted from view.

Adam turned and looked back. The old house appeared to lie once more asleep. No ray of light gleamed upon his sight from this position. The peaked roof gave no hint of the clanging, stifled throat, hidden somewhere among the grotesque shadows beneath its shelter, or of the shrill infant's cry that might even now be ringing along its rafters. The torn veil of the timid brook had been mended by one breath of the pitying zephyr, and again he and his world were outside, separate, free!—and yet never free again, for the whole picture was photographed upon his mind—that delicate camera which receives the impress of the darkest hours with even more faithfulness than that of the brightest.

A peculiar smile flitted over Adam's nervously twitching lips which nothing but the inciting thought in his own brain could have interpreted—then the picture vanished from his sight.

He laid tighter hold of the reins with his cold hand, and forced himself to think calmly. Every rod of the country road which was left behind by the rapidly revolving wheels

of his buggy served to widen the sudden breach between his former and present prospects. He had failed his patron at the critical moment when his services were most needed, and had thereby turned the hand of benefaction, exacting though it was, to the hand of a revengeful enemy.

He felt that the only possible thing for him to do would be to cut himself off from all former association, leave his little office in New York and commence anew in some distant city. Where should he go? He had never been a self-reliant character, and his thoughts, traveling first in one direction and then in another, ran up against some serious obstacle at every turn. The South presented many allurements, in its advantages of climate and the broadness of its field for an expert physician, but the feeling between North and South was running high. John Brown, in his fanatical zeal had filled the country with sudden frenzy. Lincoln, with his pronounced anti-slavery convictions, had already been spoken of as a presidential candidate. There were loud threats of secession, and war-rumors floated in the air.

As we have seen, Adam Links had not yet developed the mental, moral, or physical characteristics that go to make up a soldier. It was as natural for him to seek a place outside the reach of a civil conflict as it was for him to flee from Burbank's presence instead of meeting him face to face with refusal to do his will.

The gold fever of the West had not yet quite run its course, and, consequently, that part of the country presented glittering advantages, but Adam came no nearer a real decision than a vague idea that he would one day wend his way to the gold-fields.

It was this picture of a westward journey that was occupying his thoughts when he reached the quiet village of B—

The main entrance to this peaceful, self-satisfied little town lay under a long avenue of maple-trees. The morning was just faintly breaking as Adam drove beneath the chilly, dew-washed canopy of their sweeping boughs, and the soft gray light faintly appearing in the east was heralded by the triumphant crows of the cocks in the neighboring farm barn-yards.

When at last Adam drew rein, it was in front of the unpretentious livery-stable from which Mr. Burbank had hired the conveyance some ten hours before. The sleepy stable-boy received him with unsuspicious surliness, pocketing one of his precious coins with scarcely a nod of thanks.

A half hour more, and Adam boarded the first train to New York.

It was nothing to this old, wheezy, lumbering public-servant that its city passenger was feverish to put distance, as quickly as possible between himself and the scene of his midnight adventures; its services had always been of the accommodating kind, and it drew up with a hoarse blast of morning salutation at every little way-station, relieving its overtaxed breathing apparatus with great puffing respirations while patiently receiving from its country patrons heavy burdens of farm-produce.

The milk-cans clanked and thumped with grating persistency on Adam's sensitive ears, and his feet beat nervously on the dingy floor, covered with last night's peanut shells and mud-trackings. He longed for the accustomed incessant din of the city to crowd out of his head the unwelcome sounds made in its absence. And he dimly expected some peculiar revelation of the proper course to pursue, when the familiar picture of the city streets should welcome him back again.

At last the tedious journey was ended, and the city greeted him with its expected noisy hum.

Alas, it afforded him little relief! None of the many signs and hand-bills flaunting their importance from doors, windows, and house-tops seemed to bear any particular message for him; no wealthy pedestrian fell at his feet afflicted with some painful disorder which would claim his professional attention, and command, from a skillfully relieved patient, his lifelong friendship. He had had his place and his outlook in life, and he had cut himself off from both. It mattered nothing to this time-hardened and philosophical old city that a suddenly-awakened conscience had prompted the act. It merely winked its watchful eyes like a modern Argus and whispered confidentially its favorite motto, "Look out for Number One."

Adam made his way mechanically to his own little office. This, too, received him coldly. The slate, to which, by force of habit, his eyes were immediately directed, was innocent of any encouraging mark, and even the books, dusty upon their shelves, seemed to harbor a growing contempt for his general worthlessness. He threw himself into a chair, too indifferent to his frowning prospects to raise the shades at the window, and followed his line of unavailing thought.

It would be impossible to dispose of his small belongings except at a great sacrifice, and he was not in a position to make sacrifices. He had no money for a long journey. He was not fitted for any vocation except that of a physician and surgeon, while, in spite of his poor luck so far, he felt that his profession had been wisely chosen, and he believed that he might one day make his mark as a practitioner.

But even more than all these considerations against a sudden flight, weighed heavily another influence, which

Adam scarcely acknowledged to himself. It was his interest in the fate of his deserted patient, Burbank's frail and beautiful daughter.

He wondered how Burbank would manage to provide proper medical care for her without exciting suspicion of foul play—which suspicion he knew would be avoided at whatever cost. He wondered what falsehood would be devised to explain the sudden disappearance of the physician; and more still, he wondered what possible disposition the worthy grandfather could make of the child, when its cries should discover its vigorous life, and its undesired presence in the house, also what explanation the proud Burbank would make to a vulgar old nurse he had found it necessary to provide.

In spite of his weariness, his anxiety, and his helplessness, Adam pulled the cap, which he had not removed, over his eyes, and had a long mirthless laugh all to himself. It was a peculiar getting even of his own heart with the strong man against whom his better nature had battled so long and so unavailingly, a sort of spasm of the over-strained nerves like a fit of hysteria—and Adam felt somehow relieved after it. He got up, threw up the window shades, dusted off his books and bottles, carefully rubbed the already too clean slate and went out to get his lunch.

Before night two very important things had happened to Adam. He had arrived at a conclusive decision to remain just where he was till he heard something from the old farm—and he had had his first patient.

For a while after this, the days slipped by very smoothly. The episode of the farm seemed to have glided completely out of his life, as though it had been nothing but a bad *dream*. Not a word or threat came from the outraged Bur-

bank, nor a whisper of dire results to his deserted daughter, nothing but a complete silence which would have been ominous to one not prepared for the worst.

Meanwhile, "the first patient" had proved a sort of rendezvous for all kinds of disease-imps which the young doctor succeeded so well in exorcising as to call forth his patient's profound admiration. This afflicted individual was an old man with more money than ills and more notions than the sum total of both. But he declared, half in jest and half in earnest, that Dr. Links frightened away rheumatic gout and dull headache with the baneful glance of his smaller eye, and braced up his patient with the cheerful, hopeful expression of the other. Adam knew little of the good gentleman's real opinion, and only judged his own success from the frequent demands made upon him, and the occasional patients who presented themselves through the old man's influence.

Times were growing better at last, and Adam would have been quite contented, but for that strange, silent uncertainty hanging over him.

He sat alone in his office one day, for once diverted from his usual absorbing reflections by the study of a new and important medical discovery. He heard, but did not heed, the opening and shutting of the heavy street-door; but he did heed, with a start, a rap on his own door that sounded only too familiar.

He started to his feet and, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, called in the steadiest voice he could command, "Come in."

The door opened with great deliberation and Mr. Burbank walked in. So self-possessed, and so much at home, he entered, that he did not even trouble to say good-morning. One would have thought he had just stepped out. He rested

his stout cane against the wall, laid his silk hat carefully upon the table, drew off his gloves and dropped them inside, then calmly seated himself in Adam's chair, from which position of well-considered advantage, he regarded his dependent with dignified scrutiny.

All this time Adam had not uttered a word. He had merely followed his visitor's movements with indignant eyes and raved inwardly at his own perturbation and obvious inferiority of manner. Burbank's calm assumption of possession included even himself. The man could not, by any words, have so forcefully presented his claim as patron,—and Adam fairly gnashed his teeth in silent rage.

When Burbank felt satisfied that he had sufficiently impressed his former dependent with the helplessness of his position, he condescended to speak.

"I said I had never mistaken a fool for a wise man. I now say further, that I never mistake a coward for a brave man. But cowardice, unlike foolishness, sometimes has its place."

"I—— you!" ejaculated Adam, starting forward with lowered head and tense muscles.

But Burbank met the menace and the invective with like calmness, never taking his eyes from his victim's face, while he rested his elbows on the arms of his chair and matched the long fingers of his hands together, one by one.

"A man who only flees after his work is done must be forgiven for the unfortunate feebleness of a nature that makes him flee at all," continued his tormentor.

"What do you mean?" demanded Adam hoarsely.

"What do I mean?" repeated Burbank, with the slightest possible raising of the voice. "I mean that I always manage to have more than one iron in the fire, and that there is

more than one physician to take charge of an accouchement case—though there may be only one to take charge of an undesired child.”

“Have you mercifully decided, then, to allow the child to live?” sneered Adam, failing to comprehend his visitor’s remark.

“Allow the child to live!” echoed Burbank, surprised out of his studied calmness. “Are you losing your common faculties as well as your nerve?” he demanded insultingly.

“I am just developing both,” returned Adam, gaining control of himself as Burbank lost his.

“Explain yourself, then!” growled Burbank.

“Rather explain yourself!” returned Adam.

“Confound this bandying words!” cried Burbank, now thoroughly aroused. “What do you mean by asking me if I have decided to allow the child to live?”

A new thought flashed through Adam’s mind and he said coldly, “You have too far flattered me in assuming that I have lost all wisdom. You will not succeed in coercing me into a belief that I am responsible for the fate of the child, after all. I cut myself off from your devilish influence when I left it, living, on your hands. I have no wish to return to your tender protection or to your midnight service.”

Burbank’s look of genuine amazement and growing consternation rather staggered Adam, but he managed to retain a calm exterior and waited for his companion’s reply.

“Adam, you have either gone mad or developed unexpected resources,” he said at last, with an expression of mingled anxiety and impatience. “I did not come here with any desire to upbraid you or to get you into trouble. All this fool’s play of cross-purposes is more than senseless and worse than useless. My plans are accomplished, and

however you may have sneaked away from the responsibility of your patient, I shall not hold you culpable for evils that I was able to avert by calling in another physician. So have done with this nonsense and let us understand each other."

"Agreed!" said Adam, "then tell me how you disposed of the child!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Burbank, starting from his chair with more abandon than Adam had ever seen him betray, "I will not be an intrenchment for your ill-chosen return bullets. I have you at my mercy in more ways than one. Now answer me! How did *you* dispose of that child?"

Adam was thrown completely off his guard and cared for nothing but to unravel this mystery, which he now perceived was as much a mystery to his inquisitor as to himself.

"I would not be the murderer of your daughter's child," he declared defiantly. "I left it alive in the old garret at the end of the long narrow passage."

Burbank's fingers clutched the air nervously as if he would fain have had them about his companion's throat, while an expression of mingled hate and anxiety crept stealthily over his features. But after a breathless pause he only said sneeringly, "You thought you did, perhaps—if you are not a liar—but you did your work after all. I never saw the child—nor heard from it."

Adam gazed into the grim face with contending emotions. Surprise, fear, doubt, and dismay struggled for the mastery. Something about the man convinced him, as it always did, that, with all his wickedness, Burbank made it a point to speak the truth.

During the momentary pause, the elder man's habitual *shrewdness* returned to him, and he reflected that *he* had no

cause for consternation. With Adam it was different. He felt dimly that his first great sacrifice of personal interest for conscience' sake had resulted only in dismal failure, and his heart sank as he felt the *ætopus*-like arms of Burbank's old unscrupulous power closing about him.

Burbank seemed to divine his thoughts and hastened to use his advantage.

"It didn't pay, did it, Adam!" he remarked grimly, resuming all his old manner of cold unconcern and lofty authority. "I warned you before how useless it would be to thwart my will. It seems to you that Fate was with me in this, but let me give you an axiom that sounds like another you have heard—but is original with myself. Fate helps the man who helps himself!"

"And the devil helps both!" growled Adam, through his set teeth. "Take care, or the knives you juggle with will some day pierce your own heart—if you have one!"

"Thank you! I do take care, great care, Adam," replied Burbank significantly, picking up his hat and cane and backing toward the door, at which he paused, slipped his hand behind him, and turned the knob. Then bending upon Adam a menacing glare that blazed fiercely from between his narrowing eyelids he passed quietly out, repeating more and more slowly and meaningly, "I do take great care, Adam—*great* care."

Adam turned the key in the lock and sank limply into a chair. He felt giddy and sick, as though a huge serpent had uncoiled its folds and glided softly out of the door. The reaction was worse than the strain of the ordeal, for he was alone now and the hard facts of his position burned themselves into his consciousness. In spite of the uncertainty and anxiety under which he had been laboring for the past

five weeks, he had, in a certain sense, been free. He had found himself able to stand upon his own feet, he had enjoyed the approval of his own conscience and the feeling of independence which such approval brings.

Now all this was changed. His captor had returned to rivet the chains ten times more closely. Before, he had been bound only by the cords of self-interest and natural fealty to a benefactor. Now, he and his patron were partners in a crime, sharers in the same guilty secret. More than that. Burbank had discovered that his tool had played him false and would henceforth institute a cat-like watch.

He had thought to defy Burbank and throw off his galling chain, but the knowledge that the child must have died under his hand rendered him powerless and fearful.

Adam could not understand it. He knew that the babe was perfectly warm and healthy when he wrapped it in the old blanket, he knew that it was breathing when he carried it into the deserted garret, and though his will was good enough for the moment, he felt positive that his fingers had not grasped the little throat when that harsh alarm had so startled him. And yet, he had certainly intended to do the deed. The more he thought of it, the more uncertain he became of his precise action in that strange excited moment. He feverishly recalled every thought and every act till, in his anxiety, he could not separate the thought from the act, the will from the deed, and never would clearly separate them again.

His interest in the hapless object of his boyhood's silent devotion had awakened a conscience that he did not suppose he possessed. In vain he tried to throw off his feeling of guilt, assuring himself that he had intended to spare the child, and if he had not, the life of a new-born infant need

not weigh so heavily on his mind. The burden of a murderer's accusing heart came back to him every time he thought of the mother's white, unconscious face.

Adam had never dared to fall in love with Burbank's daughter. The very nature of the circumstances robbed his sentiment of a name, even to himself. The feeling he had for her was none the less keen for that. She was the ideal to which the latent good in his complex nature responded. She was his religion—for he had no other. She was the one pure, sacred, and beautiful trust that had been thrown upon his protection—for he had not yet recognized the fact of his own soul—and he had betrayed the trust. It had all come upon him so suddenly. He had not had time to think—to feel.

His heart had not been often open to tender and pitying emotions, and the crust of self-interest had been all but too thick, too impenetrable! Alas! now that it was too late a strange pity possessed him, and the hopeless wonder how he could have become the murderer of her child, turned itself over and over in his tormented brain.

Suddenly, a strange thought, flashing through his mind, startled him. He sat upright in his chair and his eyes glowed with a quick resolve. It was just possible Burbank had deceived him. He would find out if he had brought his daughter home; and if the old farmhouse proved to be again deserted, he would go up and see for himself if the child's body still lay in the ghost-ridden garret. The mere thought of exploring again that uncanny attic—and alone—filled him with creeping horror and disgust, but he would not let that stand in the way.

The resolve came as a great relief to Adam. He seized his cap and sprang to his feet. Reaching the street, he felt

the soothing and calming influence of the clear air, and was better assured of his innocence, and more hopeful of the success of his quest. If the child's body were not in the room, he should never consider himself its murderer, but rest convinced that Burbank had found other means to dispose of it. Now he must find out whether the house were again empty.

Adam had been hurrying along the street with his head down, thinking and planning busily. He had reached a corner, and was half-way over a crossing, when his steps were suddenly arrested by the appearance of a handsome team of black horses which had swiftly turned the corner and was almost upon him. He drew up hastily, and raised his eyes full in the face of Burbank's daughter. She swept him one glance of half-doubtful recognition—and was hurried by.

It seemed to Adam that every detail of the barouche and its occupant had been impressed upon his memory in that one brief glance. Never in the days of her fresh young girlhood had she looked so lovely as this. He never remembered that pensive droop about the sensitive lips, that settled sadness about the child-like eyes. It seemed impossible to him, now, that he had ever been nearer to her than at that passing moment when the carriage swept her hurriedly out of his sight, away from his desecrating presence.

He noted, in that rapid glance, that she did not wear widow's weeds, and felt instinctively, the daily indignity of her position. Forced to repudiate even her husband's memory, to live a life of falsehood and concealment, to be always in shrinking collision with her father's authority and resistless will.

Adam felt nothing but profound pity. Others, had they known all, might have called her weak, lacking in principle

and courage, but Adam was in a position to be sympathetic. If he had not been able to escape the unscrupulous iron will, how might this gentle, timid girl hope to battle successfully against it?

Thinking of her frail spiritual beauty, Adam found it impossible to believe that he had lifted a finger against her helpless child. He lifted the hand that might have done the deed and inspected it curiously, and with a feeling of loathing—it looked so coarse and brutal in contrast with that dainty, white-gloved hand that had rested like a fallen lily-petal on the dark green carriage-blanket. Well, he had seen her and he need not fear to encounter any one at the old farmhouse. He should start the very next day and satisfy himself, if possible, of the truth of Burbank's statement.

Adam did not rest well that night. His sleep was troubled by grotesque dreams. The scene in the old garret was re-enacted and, if possible, intensified. He was struggling in the horrid folds of a serpent which coiled slowly about his form from his feet up, then suddenly glared at him with Mr. Burbank's grim, hard face. Then he was gazing with starting eyes at the place where he had tossed the baby, and it was not there, till, presently, a light hand, like a fallen lily-petal, rested upon his eyes for a second, and was gone; but he saw clearer now and there lay the baby, soft and rosy in its quiet sleep, while a pair of sad, sympathetic mother-eyes looked forgivingly into his own.

Adam awoke with something like a sob from this last sweet dream. What was coming over him! He had lived all these years a careless, commonplace, stolid existence. It seemed as though the very streets had given him birth, for he remembered neither father nor mother. In spite of

the untoward conditions, he had always considered himself a lucky dog to have found a patron in Mr. Burbank. He had taken the good fortune thrown in his way with a fair degree of passive gratitude, and meant to live a decent sort of life—as such things go. Instead of this, he had actually consented to commit a penal crime, and perhaps had really carried out the intention, in some inexplicable way. When, strange to say, in the very train of this intended outrage, flowed all the tender, unselfish emotions he had ever experienced. What had he to do with the gentle touch of a woman's hand—he who had never known even a mother's caress? He tried impatiently to shake off the impressions of his dream, and rose almost before daylight.

Adam had no mind to visit the uncanny old farm again by moonlight, so he made an early start intending to reach B— early in the afternoon. But, as bad fortune would have it, his former acquaintance, the lumbering old accommodation-engine, had broken down on one of its return trips and now lay helpless upon the road, fairly dying in the harness.

This accident delayed him for more than three hours, and it was well on in the afternoon before he reached his destination. He did not wish to excite comment by hiring a vehicle from the only livery in the place—and one where he would certainly be recognized—so he started out on foot.

He had miscalculated the distance, and, in spite of his utmost exertion, it was almost sundown before he reached the top of the hill from which he had taken his last look at the old place.

He noted this fact with a curious sinking of the heart, but it was too late to turn back now, so he hurried on. Reaching the house, he took pains to reconnoiter carefully lest he

should be unpleasantly startled in his quest by coming face to face with some inhabitant of the place.

Everything was profoundly quiet, and, as time was precious, he hastened to find some means of entrance.

The doors were barred and bolted, but it was short work to force one of the little patch-worked windows, and, presently, he dropped into the well-remembered living-room of his first visitation.

Rapidly he made his way up the stairs and down the long narrow passage. His heart beat with maddening force as he paused in front of the little door so vividly impressed upon his memory, but, summoning all his pride, he threw his shoulder against it as before. This time it did not give. He tried again with no better success, then paused to examine it. The latch was a very primitive affair made by fastening a leather thong to a wooden catch on one side, then passing it through a small hole and letting it hang on the other. The leather thong had dropped out, or, possibly, had been purposely pushed through. The catch was on the other side—and Adam was locked out. He felt greatly averse to forcing the door, lest he should leave ineffaceable traces of his quest. But it was rapidly growing dark and he *must* see that attic-room.

Hurrying out of doors again, he ran to the dilapidated barns and hovels, and searched anxiously for a ladder with which to reach one of the small windows under the eaves.

While he was hunting feverishly for this necessary aid, his thoughts were busy. The dreadful old place, in all its loneliness and isolation, brought back vividly his thoughts and acts on that eventful night which now seemed so long ago. He was presently as much convinced that he had killed the child as had been before sure that he had not. He felt

again the desperation that had seethed through his veins as he sat by the cold fireplace awaiting his master's call, and he trembled in every limb with apprehension and excitement.

At last a ladder was found, stout and safe, though its old rounds were fairly moss-grown. Carrying it, by dint of great exertion, to the house, he placed it under the eaves, and still panting from the effort, climbed it round by round.

When he reached the window, he was surprised to find that one of the panes was missing. Pressing his face into the aperture, he gazed eagerly into the distant corners of the attic. At first he could discern nothing clearly. By and by his eyes became accustomed to the gloom and he saw the canopied bed quite distinctly. The round bundle was not there. His heart gave a great throb of relief.—But what was that crumpled-looking object lying in its place!

It was the blanket in which the child had been wrapped.

He remembered it perfectly, for it had had a broad red band across one edge, and this feature was plainly visible. But it was lying too flat and spread out, to cover the body of a child by any chance. Adam was again relieved. But now his straining eyes were riveted upon another object. Two red balls of fire were glowing at him from a distant corner, and the outline of a crouching black form cut themselves apart from the mass of shadows. Adam's eyes were glued to the spot with a terrible, resistless fascination.

The glowing balls burned steadily on, and he saw the crouching figure with a growing distinctness that made his flesh creep. Suddenly a thought struck him that almost made him reel. He gazed at the black object slowly lashing its tail, then at the empty bed and the tumbled blanket—and recoiled from the window in horror. -

None too soon! He almost lost his balance and fell to the ground, as there sprang through the opening close to his face, an immense black cat which ran head-foremost down the rose-vines and disappeared around the corner of the house.

Adam never remembered very distinctly how he carried the ladder back to its place, neither did he take special note of the lonely walk back to B——, nor yet of his solitary ride home on a midnight train, but from that night he believed himself the murderer of the child, and the hand that in his dream had seemed to fall with so sweet a benediction on his brow, thereafter burned into his temples, and he learned to scoff at its memory and the tender emotions it had awakened.

Adam's too-timid soul had peered cautiously out of its prison, longing and hungry-eyed. Fate had slammed the door in its face and, for a season, it ventured no more out.

CHAPTER III.

NEARLY eighteen months made memorable in the nation's history had passed since the events recorded in the last chapter.

It was early in the month of January, 1862. The long smouldering feud between North and South had ripened into bitter conflict, and for nine months the nation had been struggling in the throes of civil war.

Since the first bloodshed in the streets of Baltimore, April 19th, 1861, battles had been lost and won, first on one side, then on the other, the Confederates gaining success in the two great conflicts of the year—Bull Run and Wilson's Creek, and the Federals saving Fort Pickens and Fortress Monroe. The whole South lay in a state of siege.

Adam was still in New York City. He returned from his second painful experience in the uncanny house with a dull recklessness smouldering in his veins. The delicately balanced scales of his dual nature had received a grain too much on the evil side, and the poise was lost. What he had lacked in real moral and physical courage was now made up in daring and disdain of consequences. His remaining in New York was merely from lack of determination to break away from it with no definite prospects in view.

The old man, his first patient, still showed himself a firm friend, and always spoke in enthusiastic terms of the young doctor's skill, but other patients were slow in coming.

Adam's brusque, cynical manner was neither reassuring, nor flattering. He never took the trouble to assure the patient of chronic complaints, and few real ills, that he was in a sad condition and needed great care and skillful treatment; nor yet to declare to the dying man that he was doing very well, in fact, was in a fair way to recover. A well-paying patient rarely forgives his physician for lack of these attentions; consequently, Adam was not altogether a favorite among that class. The poor received his most careful service; not because, like some physicians of the well-fed type, he went about feeling poverty-stricken pulses in order to throw up a good balance on his account with the Lord, but because they were poor devils like himself.

However, ministering to the needy had not always ministered to his own oft-pressing necessities, and he was still restlessly watching for an opportunity to better his condition, and take him out of a city which had grown highly distasteful to him.

Burbank had not troubled him since that momentous visit which burdened him with the guilt he supposed he had escaped. But Adam knew that he was only waiting. If that indomitable will should chance to run up against another obstacle, the old, necessary, and heretofore available, tool would be immediately claimed, under threat.

Adam had so far arrived at a dare-devil frame of mind, that he would not so much object to being used as a tool, providing the proper recompense were forthcoming, as he should mind being further handled by so detested an agent.

As to Burbank's daughter, Adam did not even know where she was. He had never seen her since that passing glimpse in the street. This he regarded as quite a turn of fortune

in his favor, for he never wanted to lay eyes upon her again.

One morning, upon returning from an early visit to one of his poor patients, Adam espied a long, official-looking letter lying upon his desk. He seized it eagerly and tore it open. The contents were evidently in a high degree gratifying, for he flung it upon the table with an exclamation of satisfaction and, shaking his fist at an imaginary figure opposite, growled beneath his breath, "There, you go to the devil your way and I'll go mine! The world is nothing but a d—— hodge-podge of religious pretensions and devil's deeds. The devil loves religion because it covers his deeds so well, and religion loves the devil because he has such a fat living. Lord, how it stirs my gall when I think of that cursed Burbank down on his hypocritical knees, of a Sunday morning, praying to the Lord with the humility of a saint, and winking to the devil with the other eye to stand by and hand him up what the Lord intended for some other fellow. I'll sail under an honest banner anyway, and make no professions. The war'll toughen me up a bit, and that's what I need. The old devil never invented anything more to his satisfaction than war—quite the place to enlist my services."

The letter which afforded Adam occasion for this soliloquy was a commission as physician and surgeon in the army. He had passed his medical and physical examination with great credit, and the strong personal influence of his admiring patient, the rich old man, had completed his success as an applicant for the post.

The new lieutenant lost no time in gathering up his little belongings and making ready to enter upon his new duties. He joined the Fourth New Hampshire regiment under Col.

Whipple and embarked on the warship Wabash. Soon the whole fleet left the port and sailed for the scene of military operations.

Adam first saw active service at Port Royal. His hatred of conflict of any kind soon became a thing of the past. So much so, that he went to the extreme and began to love battle for battle's sake, as though, in this wanton waste of human life, his own crime grew to be of little moment.

He became a favorite with his comrades, first because of his great and ready skill in an emergency, and second, because, in spite of his rough, harsh manner, the touch of his hand was unaccountably gentle, and the "good eye," which in times of his dare-devil words and deeds seemed to be entirely outshone by the wicked, sinister expression of the other, beamed sympathy and half-regretted compassion.

His virtues appeared to advantage in this company of rough soldiers, but his vices grew by the hour. He smoked and drank excessively—though strangely enough, no amount of liquor seemed to affect the keenness of his eye or the steadiness of his hand; he blasphemed with utter abandon, and scoffed at everything sacred. Sensuality seemed to be the one vice lacking. He shunned the company of women altogether, declaring that he never saw but one woman who interested him, and that woman was a slave whom her master was just launching upon the market—at a high price.

In March, 1862, The Wabash, with Dr. Link's regiment aboard, sailed south to take Fort Marion at St. Augustine. On the eleventh of the month the ship dropped anchor just outside the bar. The United States gunboat, Isaac Smith, commanded by Captain Nicholson, entered the bay under a flag of truce. A white flag appeared upon the fort, and commander and unarmed crew went ashore. They were

courteously received by the mayor and city council. The small Confederate garrison of two companies had evacuated the fort during the night. Soon the national ensign was flying above the walls. The national troops entered, and this commenced a new career for Adam, far away from New York and the detested Burbank.

Life at Fort Marion was very quiet and uneventful. With the exception of one or two little skirmishes, the soldiers saw no active service, and mingled freely with the people of the quaint little town, finding thereby a welcome relaxation from their monotonous daily duties. The health of the fort was singularly good, and Doctor Links found the time hanging heavy upon his hands. Nevertheless, he liked St. Augustine, and declared that, but for being under martial law, it would be the one place in which he would care to live. Restless and lawless in spirit, he often managed to evade rules, and was out on more than one forbidden expedition.

The city bridge over the San Sebastian River had been partly torn down in order to cut off attack by land. During the day, a beam was thrown across the gap to allow foot-passengers necessary entrance to the city. It was death to cross without a permit.

Late one afternoon Adam, who was something of a privileged character as a physician, stood upon the city side of the river gazing listlessly down upon the dark flow beneath. He heard the sound of light footsteps approaching, and looking up beheld, on the other side of the bridge, a frail woman with a young infant in her arms, rapidly nearing him. She stopped anxiously in front of the yawning gap and, noting the doctor's uniform, begged him to obtain a pass, in order that she might carry her sick child into the city.

The doctor shook his head. He could not obtain her a pass, he declared, she would better go home.

The woman looked pleadingly into his strange, sinister face and a shiver of distrust seemed to pass over her, but the mother-anxiety outweighed all the rest, and she still urged her petition, saying that she must take her child into the city to be treated by the young physician at the fort, who, she had heard, was greatly skilled in his profession,

The doctor gave her a side glance from under his bent eyebrows and said significantly, "The fort doctor kills or cures by sorcery and looks on babies with an evil eye."

The tearful young mother answered imploringly, "Do not trifle with me, sir, but do, I beg of you, give me your aid. My child is dying before my eyes!"

Adam's strange features underwent a quick change, and impulsively, regardless of rules and regulations, he crossed over to the woman's side.

"Let me see the child," said he, in his gruff tones.

The woman drew it closer to her breast and then, as if fearful of offending him, tenderly uncovered its pitiful little face.

Adam, glancing at it with sharp, professional eyes, said shortly, "It needs the best of care and strictest medical attention."

"I must go over then," pleaded the mother. "I can care for it properly nowhere else. My friends are all in the city."

"Cross then," rejoined the doctor gruffly, "I will take the responsibility."

"O God bless you!" exclaimed the woman—then looked askance at the dark chasm and its slender bridge. "Could you carry my baby?" she asked wistfully: "my head is so giddy with sleeplessness and watching, I fear to cross with it in my arms."

"I carry it!" the doctor exclaimed, with a wild gleam in his half-mocking face. "It isn't safe!—It isn't safe! The doctor has an evil eye—for babies!"

"Oh! are you the doctor then?" faltered the mother in amazement.

"I am, madam," replied Adam, receiving the child from its mother's half-unwilling arms. "Who should carry a baby deftly if not the doctor? Follow me, madam,"—and he stepped upon the bridging beam.

The mother watched him with anxious eyes. When half-way across he called back over his shoulder, "Oh, if this child knew that a hated Yankee was carrying him across this slender plank!"

The wrongs and pains of the long, weary, heart-sick months welled up in the mother's throat, and in a shrill voice she cried fiercely, "May he live to fight the Yankees to the death and torment their children after them!"

With an oath, Adam lifted the child over his head. "If I thought he would!" he cried, and stood balanced on his treacherous footing like an avenging demon, with his victim held aloft in his arms. "A baby safe in Adam Links's arms! Impossible, ha! ha! ha! . . . ha! ha! ha!" he laughed wildly.

The mother gave a piercing shriek and stood paralyzed with terror. But in a second the baby was safely resting again against the blue uniform, the bridge was quickly passed, and she tottered across to see the doctor with that sinister profile turned away from her, looking down upon her child, with a strange expression of sadness and tenderness upon his face.

She stood dumb with surprise. He placed the baby unharmed in her waiting arms, saying, half-sternly, half-

kindly, "You did a daring thing." Then seeing that she was trembling and weak with agitation, he carefully guided her uncertain footsteps along the rough narrow streets to her destination.

From that day he gave the child every possible attention, almost constituting himself its nurse, so often did he visit it during its short span of life. The mother both loved and feared him, longed for and dreaded his presence; but the little sufferer wasted slowly away, and the doctor went back to the fort one night saying to his comrades with something between a sigh and a sneer, "Beware of me! I have killed a baby with my evil eye!"

So the months crept slowly by till at last the news came of Lee's surrender. The weary war was ended. A little longer Fort Marion was held by the Union troops, but by and by they packed up their worn army belongings, said good-bye to the many Rebel friends they had made in their long, peaceful stay, and sailed away to their northern homes.

There was one who remained behind. It was the young lieutenant, Dr. Links. He had established himself in a little office on Saint George Street and there, he declared, he should make his home. He was by this time well-known in St. Augustine. He had not many friends, and those he had, felt, at times, a strange fear and distrust when in his presence. Nevertheless no illness of any severity was ever reported that Dr. Links was not the attending physician. He had made his mark in his profession, and he cared not one farthing what any one thought of his personal life—at least, so he told himself.

CHAPTER IV.

ON the very day that Adam landed in St. Augustine, a great change was taking place at the old farm, where his life-plans had been so rudely unsettled.

Burbank had spoken the truth when he said, with a sneer, he guessed he should be willing enough to part with the old place after that night. He had immediately set about finding a purchaser. For once the money-interest was not the greatest interest. He had surprised even himself by offering the farm at less than a reasonable price.

He was even putting it in repair. Four or five stout workmen were busy obliterating the character lines in the rugged visage of the patriarchal mansion, and giving the weather-beaten exterior a new coat of paint, just as the faded belle seeks to renew her youth by sundry stiffenings, paddings, and generous use of paint-box and pencil.

It was rough March weather. The whole place had put off its aspect of mystery and enchantment at the first sound of the hammer. The earth-stained snow lay piled about in confused, wind-driven heaps. The bleak winds whistled through the naked boughs of the old sentinels on the hill, who, no longer resisting, creaked dismally in dull complaining. The little brook ran on silently between its narrow banks edged with long lines of thin jagged ice-fringe.

On the hearth of the great fireplace, before which Adam had crouched in gloomy darkness, a noisy log-fire was now *burning* right merrily. To this spot of cheer the workmen

had hastened, for it was the noon-hour. They stamped their numbed feet and held their thick red fingers toward the grateful blaze, then opened their tin-pails and proceeded to do justice to the homely lunches prepared by wife, sister, or mother.

While in the midst of this simple repast, they were joined by the new owner of the long-deserted homestead. The circle about the fire received him cordially, as one of themselves, and he drew up a chair and took his place among them.

He was a man past middle life, tall and square of build, but with not a pound of flesh to spare. His hair was iron-gray and combed back from a forehead slightly bald. His blue eyes shone with a keen, kind, or merry twinkle from under his grizzled brows, and his large mouth was broad with an excess of generous good feeling, and tolerance of all humankind.

He, also, stretched toil-hardened fingers toward the fire saying, in a full cheery voice, "Well, boys, how are you comin' on with the work?"

"'Taint so bad as you'd a-thought, Mr. Bearall," replied the spokesman of the party. "A little patchin' up here and there, some new roofin', a few chimneys mended, a coat of paint, and the job's done."

"I'm glad to hear it, glad to hear it!" responded the old man heartily. "We must make Mr. Burbank's money go as far's possible. By the way, boys, you don't want to touch a thing up in the big garret on the east side. I agreed to let Mr. Burbank use that for a store-room to keep his heir-looms in."

"No danger of disturbin' anything there, I guess," returned one of the workmen. "You can't get in 'thout takin'

the door off. I tried to find a way in to see if there was any leak in the roof, but gave it up when I found the latch off the door. But the peeked window under the roof had one of the panes broken out and I mended that from the outside."

"That's right, that's all's needed for the present, I guess," said Isaac Bearall contentedly. "I hope the house will be all ready for us to move in by the middle of next month. You can finish work on the outbuildin's afterwards."

"Easy enough, easy enough!" declared the spokesman decidedly. "We'll let you in afore that, if you want to come."

"No, no, that'll be time enough!" replied the employer. "I must be goin' back now. Take good care you don't set nothin' afire here," he added prudently. "Better see that the logs are clean burned out before you leave here nights."

So the work progressed rapidly to an end. Mr. Burbank had not troubled himself to superintend operations; perhaps he did not particularly care to see the old place again. He had virtually lost his daughter after that memorable night spent there. True, he had never posed as a fond, indulgent father, but she was his all, and until that night he had always received a certain timid affection from her that, now it was no longer forthcoming, he missed.

This weakness had not, however, prevented him from exacting the most unquestioning obedience to his plans for her marriage with a suitor of long-standing, the wealthy, well-connected De Monteano.

Whatever might have been the reason for his particular course in the matter of selling the farm, certain it was he had made the sale to Farmer Bearall—long a resident of the vicinity—entirely through correspondence, and had afterwards allowed him a sum for repairs, lest the bargain should fail to be closed.

The work was finished by the middle of April, according to promise, and the task of moving began.

The farmers' hay-wagons had been called out rather early to do this neighborly act of "movin' the Bearalls's."

Three of these lumbering vehicles had deposited their groaning burdens at the kitchen door. Father Bearall was working like a beaver to get the household goods safely inside before the mistress arrived, when some one bawled out, "Taint no use, old man, here comes the misssus herself!"

The toiling man paused in his efforts and wiped the perspiration from his bald forehead. "Whew!" he whistled softly to himself, "Mother'll have an awful fit if she sees that 'ere long scratch on the side of her chist of drawers. I meant to get it alongside of the wall, 'fore she got here!"

But "Mother" was bearing rapidly down upon the scene. From her high perch on the spring-seat of Neighbor Lowry's lumber-box wagon she surveyed the unsightly heaps of her household idols with an indignant countenance.

Across her lap lay the old wooden clock, wrapped around with her best Paisley shawl. From one arm depended a flannel-bag holding the household silver, and the other hugged tightly a bundle containing her "buryin' outfit,"—complete to the last stitch. Her feet were resting on enormous bags of dried apples packed to the top of the dashboard.

As the horses came down the hill, the rattling noise and strong impetus of the heavy wagon behind them seemed to excite their spirits, and they suddenly broke into a bold gallop.

"Lord-a-mercy! do stop them beasts!" screamed the matron, as the heavy clock beat her knees, and the spring-seat jounced madly up and down under her. "I shall be pounded to a jelly!" she groaned.

But the horses paid no heed to the frantic "whoas!" of the Lowry hired man and the new mistress dashed forceably up to her own door, her body dancing like a puppet toy on the hard, board seat, and her thick-soled feet beating an unwilling tattoo on the jolting bags of dried apples.

Farmer Bearall hastened to her relief and, after carefully unloading her, rescued her stiffened frame from its unenviable position.

He lifted her down easily. She was a little woman. It was her boast that when "father" married her he could span her waist with his hands. Not at all improbable, since it was the day of tight lacing, and Farmer Bearall's blunt-tipped fingers were of surprising length.

Whatever she might have been in that day long gone by, she was a little woman still, with a nervous, wiry frame, muscular hands and arms, and quick, decided movements. Her head was small and firmly set, with still an abundance of severely-dressed, light brown hair. Her eyes were pale blue and set in their narrow windows close to her strong large nose. The cheek bones were rather prominent in her thin, unwrinkled face, and the small mouth closed firmly with contracted corners and compressed lips.

Her ride had not improved the good lady's temper, and she said sharply as she stretched her aching limbs,

"I might a-knowned better than to let you undertake this unpackin' alone! If I'd a-been here *that* wouldn't a-been done!" and she pointed savagely to the long scratch, immediately discovered by her ferreting eyes.

"Well, now, mother," said her husband soothingly, "you can't expect to get three loads of goods packed and on-packed 'thout a scratch. I'll be bound everybody's been as careful as they knowed how to be. Hadn't you better

go in and lay off your bunnet and stay awhile?" he asked good-naturedly, a smile twitching the corners of his mouth.

"Lay 'em where, I should like to know?" snapped the exasperated woman, stalking into the little stone kitchen, followed by her unconsciously irritating spouse.

Once inside, she cast a scowling glance over the disorderly heaps of half-unpacked furniture, and then began to fumble vigorously at her waist line.

Presently the clothes seemed to be slipping from her, and Farmer Bearall looked aghast in the direction of the men bobbing in and out, and then in consternation at his usually prudish wife. One, two, three petticoats and a hooped-skirt sank slowly to her knees, and she stood stiffly in the middle of the mound they created, like a pitch-fork in a haystack, while she stripped off hastily as many waists.

Her modest "better half" drew a sigh of relief as she stepped spryly from the débris—still clothed.

"I thought you looked kind a pussy," he said meditatively, as she shook out the whole mass of discarded garments with one vigorous sweep of her strong arm.

"You did 'eh!" she retorted disdainfully. "I don't s'pose a man could even be taught to think beyond the end of his nose, nohow! Thank the Lord you've got a wife to do your thinkin' ahead for you, or you'd a gone to Guinea long ago. It's as father allus said 'Catharine don't allow nothin' to go to sleep' round her!'"

"That's what you don't, mother! that's what you don't," assented the old man reflectively. "There ain't many women like you! I'll swear to that!" And he plodded slowly out, shaking his gray head musingly as he went.

It certainly did not take this energetic woman long to "straighten things out." Her commanding voice rang out

like a general's. She had a genius for managing, and a hawk's eye for detecting any desire to shirk work or slight details. Under her direction, the ungainly piles of household goods melted away like magic, and found their proper places, apparently of their own accord.

At the end of the third day's work in their new home, the worthy couple were sitting at peace in the little stone kitchen, as they called it, which had been the scene of Adam's bitter musings.

Farmer Bearall was, in his way, an intellectual, thinking man, though not an educated one. He loved nothing so well as to spend the long winter evenings reading aloud to his family. To be sure, his voice was as hard and unbending as the bleak outlines of his monotonous life, but although it added no ornament to the sentences as they flowed steadily from his lips, at least it did not obscure their meaning, and "Father" always found appreciative listeners.

Much of the old zest had departed since Teddy and Milly had both married and gone away, and often the weekly paper would slip to his knee, when a furtive glance at "Mother" over the top of his "specs" revealed that unimaginative lady fast asleep over her knitting. The kind, wistful old eyes would blur and swim in the overflowing waters of tender memories. And through this magic veil, a vision of little Milly with her big appreciative eyes would look thoughtfully up at him.

But the brave heart had long since learned to smile over its own tears, and, after a moment of tender communing with the past, he would wink away the magic curtain of his visions, and blow his nose with the force and suddenness of a fog-horn. Whereat the good wife opposite him would

slip the next stitch as if nothing had happened and "widden," the next row by sheer force of habit.

To-night there had been a letter from the dear absent daughter, now settled comfortably in New York. The communication had received one careful perusal, but Milly's letters were never old to her lonely parents, and as they sat comfortably before the fire, the father took it tenderly out of his breast-pocket and commenced reading it anew.

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER:—

"I scarcely know how to write. One sees so many heart-rending sights in this great city. My dear husband gone and Teddy gone—gone to the cruel war! We can only hope and pray for their dear lives. It is a mystery how we can eat and drink and sleep and talk, with this awful thing hanging over us. Yet what if we could not! Thank God you are as far away from the sight and sound of it all, as you are.

"I have just returned from a great prayer-meeting held in the 'Home for the Friendless' on Thirtieth Street. Such a sight, mother, five hundred wives and mothers praying in agony of fear for their loved ones.

"But that was not all that wrung my heart in the hour passed there. The institute is crowded to the doors with poor, helpless, homeless, motherless, and fatherless little ones. How many more will there be before this wicked war is ended?

"Perhaps Teddy's, perhaps—mine! Oh God! how long! how long!"

"As I started to leave the asylum, I came face to face with a baby boy. He had escaped from the older child put in charge of him, and ran breathlessly almost into my arms.

“ ‘He is a new one,’ the matron explained, ‘and we cannot pacify him. We know nothing of him except that the old woman from whom he was taken, when she was sent to the Island for drunkenness, called herself Polly Halsey. She acknowledged that the child did not belong to her, but positively refused to say anything further about herself or him.’ Father, mother, I wish you could see him! Such a beautiful child, with great dark eyes, and glossy black curls; with such a noble head and refined features. He cannot be a common street-waif, I am sure. When he put up his little arms to me, and looked pleadingly into my face with his big solemn eyes, I did not know how to tear myself away from him and leave him to be only one of the many among that pitiful throng of waifs.

“ Father dear, it would be a great comfort to you to have such a sweet little fellow about. Can’t you and mother take him to cheer you up in your new home? The child cannot be more than two years old. You would soon learn to love him as your own.

“ If you had heard a good woman, herself a foster-mother, plead for them as I did, you could not refuse while God gives you the full measure of health and strength you enjoy.

“ There, I must not say too much! I leave it all with you. May you be guided by a higher Counsel!

“ Are you happy in the new home? It was so good of you to give Teddy the first chance by leaving the other farm to him. May he soon be back again to manage for himself!

“ Don’t work too hard, mother! There’s something beside all that. Take time to enjoy each other, you and father, as you go along. Ah! it seems as though years of cruel,

throbbing anxiety were bundled into these mad months of war. Be happy together, I say, out of the depths of my lonely heart.

“Your loving daughter,
“MILLY.”

Father Bearall's voice grew husky and his eyes dim over the reading of this letter. He found his usual relief in blowing his nose violently, then leaned back in his chair and waited for his wife to speak.

Mrs. Bearall found an outlet for her emotions also in her usual way. She arose from her chair with a snatch and, clapping up the tongs, stirred the fire in the new kitchen stove with unnecessary zeal, considering it was the middle of April.

“That girl is just like you!” she burst forth in the midst of her exertions. “She never looks at nothin’ in a practical way. The Lord knows we never would ‘a’ had a roof over our heads, if it hadn’t ‘a’ been for me! What with slavin’ and diggin’ and savin’; raisin’ hens, geese, ducks, turkeys, pigs, and calves; to say nothin’ about the churnin’ and butter-makin’ it’s a wonder the Lord has saved me alive. See the way I’ve worked, Isaac Bearall! As poor father often said, ‘Nothin’ ever slept ‘round Catharine!’ and no more they don’t, Isaac Bearall—the Lord witnessin’!” And she folded her hands across her breast, set her lips tightly together, and looked piously upward, mentally adjuring the Lord to stand by her now or never, even as He held sacred the honor and glory of His Name.

“Amen!” muttered Farmer Bearall promptly—probably by force of habit.

In the tense calm that succeeded this spiritual exaltation,

the unfortunate man called his wife's eyes down from heaven (where they were busy beholding a picture of her sanctified self, crowned with glory before the Throne), with the unpremeditated remark :

"Mother, you don't seem to have no idea that I had anything to do with the raisin' of them animals and fowls you was talkin' about—specially with the feedin' of 'em. Now how about the raisin' of all the feed-stuff?" he asked impressively, seeking to catch his wife's eyes.

He caught them. Rising solemnly from her chair, she transfixed him with her slow, astonished gaze, then heaving an explosive sigh like a gust of north wind, she again raised her eyes, appealing to the Lord, and proceeded to lay bare her insulted heart to the powers that be.

"O Lord, to think Thou hast suffered Thy servant to come to this! Thy handmaiden that hast tended unto this man night and day. (Sobs.) 'The sinnin' woman did wash Thy feet and wipe them with the hair of her head, but I, O Lord, have *been* both hands and feet for this baser vessel, for nigh on to thirty years (more sobs), and now he denies me, as Thou, O Lord, wast denied. He denies my sacrificin' myself for him, when 'Thou O Lord, dost know how many men would have been proud to wipe *my* feet with the hairs o' their heads —," and she threw herself into her chair in a heap of disconsolate wrath.

Poor Isaac's sense of humor had saved his reason more than once, and it saved it now.

"Come, come, mother!" he said soothingly, after he had spent a silent moment watching the distressed figure rocking back and forth, hugging its fancied abuse and its grief frantically to its breast. "Come, come, mother, you couldn't for the life of you tell what's the matter with you. Least-

ways I can't. It all started in over that little boy, Milly was writin' about, and I ain't even asked you to take him."

"Father Bearall!" cried the wife, as her face flew out of its hiding with a jerk, "don't add the green-eyed monster, Deceit, to your other sins or you'll find your pack too heavy to carry into the Celestial City! I ain't said one word against takin' that child."

"I don't intend to carry no pack into the Celestial City," returned her husband grimly. "If you didn't say nothin' about the child, what, b'gosh, did you say! It would take a six-clawed tom-cat to hang on to your remarks anyway!"—Even poor Isaac was sometimes moyed, in addition to his excessively bad grammar under provocation, to use a mild form of bad language.

"I-zaac Bearall! Not another word will I say! I shall bear your taunts meekly, as my blessed Saviour did. Taunt on, taunt ever, as the poet said. I will shut my ears and my mouth on your unregeneration."

"The Lord be praised!" muttered Isaac under his breath.

The good lady picked up her knitting again and her needles clicked furiously for about twenty minutes.

Father Bearall, from time to time glancing furtively at her over his spectacles, saw her face slowly change and return to its usual expression of uncompromising determination.

Presently she picked up the offending letter and stuffed it into her pocket. Then catching up the nearest candle she started off to bed without a word.

Farmer Bearall heaved a sigh of relief as the door closed behind her, and laid the paper he had been reading upside down upon his knee.

"She does beat anything I ever heard of," he soliloquized; "that's so, she does. And yet there ain't a bad drop of

blood in her veins ! Where the deuce she got the idea that she's earned the livin' fer this 'ere family is more'n I can make out ; but she's got it, and got it hard." And he groaned. " More'n that, she'll keep it. It didn't use to be so bad when little Milly was here," he said tenderly to himself.

With that his big heart passed into the sunny plains of long-ago, with Milly, and came back therefrom rested and refreshed. Poor generous hearts so often lonely, so often misunderstood ! Thank God for the sunny plains of memory and the blooming byways of hope !

Father Bearall came down early next morning to light the kitchen fire, as was his habit. When his wife appeared, he gazed at her in amazement. She was arrayed in her best black alpaca, sweeping well out over her large hoops. She wore her ample scoop-bonnet over her neat hair, and the Paisley shawl adorned her stiffly erect shoulders.

The unswerving glance she swept her husband was something to behold, and in answer to his rather timid inquiry, she replied grandly, " I am going to New York for the child ! "

Isaac's first feeling was one of anger that she should think of taking such an important step without further consulting him. But, caught in time by the memory of last night's scene and the painful uselessness of all protests and arguments, he ventured no objections.

An hour later, the straight, trim, little figure was on its unaccustomed way to New York.

The matron of the asylum was a good deal surprised, not to say amused, by some of the country lady's uncompromising statements and advices, as well as her sweeping assertions in regard to the proper " bringin' up " of a child.

However, the gentle, tactful Milly was before her as an example, and the good matron relinquished her charge without fear.

So the sweet, dark-eyed, curly-headed boy was brought home to Isaac's fatherly heart.

When the big man first saw the child, he looked at him almost bashfully, as big men sometimes do, but when the little fellow puckered up his red lips and his round eyes filled with tears, Father Bearall held out his long arms and cried coaxingly, "Come to Grandpa Bearall, come!"

And to Grandpa Bearall the child went with all the unrequited love in his swelling little breast.

CHAPTER V.

As it was in the days of Noah when "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the flood came and swept them all away," so it has been ever since, and so it ever will be.

The doubled-faced old Earth feeds her creatures with one hand, then sweeps them, over-full, out of existence with the other. The same priest buries a friend at four and marries another at eight—together the mourners and wedding-guests sit down to feast to the common body and ward off the common death.

So the old world wags on. The war brought in its procession of sheeted dead at one church door and life bowed out its train of veiled brides at the other.

We would not even pause to contemplate the too-familiar picture of human existence save that one of the veiled brides belongs to us—we know her. Anything that touches *our* little world is worthy of attention.

It was about the first of May, 1865, immediately after the close of the war. A certain wealthy church in the City of New York was preparing for a wedding. The usual air of mystery pervaded the arrangements, and the usual groups of idle newsboys, sauntering nurse-maids, and inquisitive school-children hung about the vicinity watching the florist's wagons depositing their burdens, and speculating upon the particular emotions of the "swells" who were to be prominent in the approaching ceremonies.

The blue firmament bent ardently over the moist warm earth that glowed passionately in its embrace and blossomed beneath its touch. The air throbbed with reproductive tenderness, and earth, air, and sky kissed each other in the ecstasy of spring's voluptuous life.

In New York City, as elsewhere, people were already beginning to breathe freely in the assurance of settled peace, and had well-nigh recovered from the gasping horror of President Lincoln's assassination.

So day glided into evening, and the church, for the time distinguished from its fellows by the importance of its prospective service, waited, in silent and impressive solemnity, for the coming of the bride.

One by one the street lamps twinkled into duteous life, and two stalwart policemen stationed themselves, one on either side of the awning stretched to the curb.

As the stated hour of eight approached, expectant humanity flowed in at the wide-flung doors, and the inquisitive soul of the barred-out populace manifested itself in the motley crowd spreading itself along the street behind the backs of the imperturbable officers. Curiosity is a great leveler of rank, and more than one well-gowned woman stood in the crush with the newsboy and the nursery-maid, while a grinning little darkey with his polished ebony skin shining through a long rent in his tattered shirt, besmirched the sidewalk with the thick yellow flow from a basketful of eggs into which he was unconsciously digging his elbow. What mattered it to him that the nation, bruised and bleeding, had just emerged from her ghastly struggle to protect his young back from the lash of the slave-driver! The world, having produced him, owed him a living, and it brought no feeling of wonder to his unenlightened mind that the altruistic soul

of humanity had travailed in agony for his enfranchisement.

At last the waiting crowd swayed and pushed in sudden excitement as one of the closely watched carriages delivered the expected bridal-party. There was a vision of shimmering white silk and floating lace, of a fair delicate face drooping behind a gauzy veil, then a tall stern man clothed in immaculate evening dress, stepped forward and bore the nun-like figure hurriedly out of view.

The choir burst forth in triumphant strains, "Behold the Bride," as the church door opened to receive them. The sweet, clear, innocent boy-voices rose joyously to the vaulted roof and floated tremblingly along the groined arches.

Slowly the bride passed up the isle, leaning upon her father's arm. Scarcely a movement disturbed her statuesque beauty. The slight rise and fall of her bosom alone betokened the beating heart within, as, with unseeing eyes wide open, she glided like one in a trance up the long aisle, past the eager faces and peering eyes. With stolid dignified bearing her escort bore her along, keeping pace with her noiseless footsteps in a measured heel-heavy tread, bespeaking grim, unbending determination.

At the altar, slightly in front of his gentlemanly attendant and the officiating clergyman, stood a slender pale man of about thirty, waiting for his bride. His glossy black hair flowed back from a fine white forehead, in the soft loose fashion of the day; his dark eyes glowed with a luminous, tender light as he watched the white-veiled, flower-like figure advancing to join him; and his expressive lips, half-hidden under a drooping mustache, slightly parted in a loving, wordless breath of greeting. A bright red spot burned steadily on either cheek, deepening slightly as he

stretched out a slender hand, and took the little one, so like a fallen lily-petal, into his fervent clasp.

The monotonous voice of the rector hushed the slight, rustling uneasiness of the spectators, and all listened with half-suspended breath as his voice broke from the conventional monotone and asked solemnly,

“Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?”

Burbank stepped forward, and, taking the fingers of his daughter's nerveless, passive hand into his own, he gave her away—did she not belong to him?—to the man he had chosen for her.

“If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else, hereafter, forever hold his peace,” continued the full organ-like tones.

Some forbidden monitor in the parent's frozen heart said sharply, “Now!” and was quickly stifled.

Some sobbing chord in the bride's inmost soul pleaded, “Now!” and her cheek grew pale as death.

But no voice responding to the challenge smote upon the deep silence, and the beautiful service flowed rhythmically on. The brilliant eyes of the bride fixed themselves upon the rector's face with a strange, fascinated gaze, and the pale lips slowly repeated the solemn vows like a child learning at its mother's knee. “For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey till death do us part.”

The fateful words were spoken, and man and wife were to kneel for the priestly benediction, but still the fascinated gaze of the bride was riveted upon the rector's face and the white lips were yet parted just as the last words had left them. There was a slight suspense. The young husband touched the passive hand of his new-made wife significantly,

still the brilliant eyes burned on unwavering, and she stood motionless like one in a dream. The clergyman made a little imperative gesture to arouse her, and, failing, concentrated the whole force of his will into an expression of intense authority, under which she sank slowly to her knees and, still gazing fixedly into his face, received the parting benediction.

The first swelling strains of the choir recalled her from her trance, and the young husband, his face beaming with almost overpowering emotions of joy, placed the little hand upon his arm with a pressure of reassuring tenderness, as side by side they made their way down the long church aisle, past the eager faces and peering eyes.

The voices of the choir-boys had died away in the distance and the assembled people rose to depart. The usual graceful comments and compliments passed lightly from lip to lip.

"The young Spaniard is very handsome."

"Yes, but what a pity he looks so consumptive! I understand he can scarcely live out of a warm climate."

"Yes, I believe he spends his winters South, but there is nothing strange in that. I believe his family history is very closely connected with the State of Florida. His ancestors were of the line of Don Manuel de Monteano who, as Governor of Florida in 1739, distinguished himself in holding the fort of St. Augustine against the English. His mother is a native of that state, which is the reason he has spent so much time in this country."

"How interesting! I had never connected his queer Spanish name with any historical personage."

"He has money of course?"

"O yes, plenty of money, I believe. He owns a beautiful little villa in St. Augustine in which he spends his

winters, and either he or his family has a fine summer residence just out of New York. They say his character is as eminently respectable as his family traditions, which is almost a paradox in these days."

"Quite too much so! Timosa must be a very happy girl. All you tell me makes me repeat, 'What a pity he is so consumptive-looking, and, for that matter, what a pity that Timosa herself is so decidedly delicate!'"

"Yes! she looked wonderfully sweet to-night but wonderfully frail. How strangely she lost control of herself for a few moments. She was like one mesmerized. By the way, how unaccountable it seems that one so timid, so shrinking, so sensitive and yielding, could be the daughter of a man like Burbank!"

"Not strange at all, to me. She is exactly like her mother whom I knew quite well. Burbank's cast-iron requirements and lack of tenderness slowly crushed her life out. She never thought of disputing or disobeying his slightest wish. He dominated her very thoughts. It is a mercy that Timosa is married, for I verily believe she would not long have escaped her mother's fate."

"Poor thing! I hope she will be happy. They say that De Monteano is passionately in love with her, and I am sure he does not look as if he had any of her father's fierce characteristics. I declare, it would be remarkable if such a timid creature for once married a man fitted to shield and protect her. Such women almost invariably fall a prey to the most tyrannical of men. For that matter, with a strange perversion of judgment, they choose that very kind."

"We will hope that this is one of the exceptions. I am really sorry to lose Timosa. My daughters are very fond of her. Have you been informed of their plans?"

"Partly ; they are to sail immediately for Europe, where they will spend the summer and fall traveling ; by that time, things will have become somewhat more settled in the South, and they will go to their home in St. Augustine for the winter."

"Possibly they will both be well and strong by that time. At any rate, we can do them no good by discussing the possibilities of their future, and if we don't wish to be left here in the darkness, we would better go home," was the laughing reply. "The sexton seems in something of a hurry."

Among the brilliant throng of wedding-guests, none noticed a shabbily-dressed, common-looking, middle-aged woman standing in a distant corner of the church. No one struggled more anxiously for a sight of the bride than she. She squeezed her black-shawled shoulders into the smallest possible space, and ducked her head right and left to catch every possible glimpse, while her coarse lips muttered continually to themselves the uncontrolled workings of her ignorant mind. "Polly Halsey, you were an old fool, a pesky, senseless, old fool. Halsey did just right to beat your stupid old bones. An old fool—an old fool !"

Her face looked ten years older than when we first saw it in the dim light of the little country bedroom. The eyes were bleared with heavy drinking, and the coarse merriment on her low-browed visage had given place to fawning shrewdness. Her ample figure had shrunk to half its former size, and the unsteady lips moved hideously and constantly under the pressure of excitement.

As the young couple moved slowly out of the church, she eyed them greedily, gloating over the rich texture of their garments with a vindictive leer. When they were fairly out of sight she shuffled rapidly out of the church, and hurried off to the lower quarters of the city mumbling to herself,

“You might ‘a’ had a big pull there. You might ‘a’ been a rich woman, Polly Halsey, if you hadn’t been such a fool, such a blasted fool, and so skeered of the old man.”

Thus apostrophizing herself, she turned off into the nearest beer-saloon, and further stupefied her already addled brain with fiery draughts over the dirty counter.

CHAPTER VI.

BURBANK was proudly making his way through the crowded streets of lower New York.

In his hard, silent way, he was more than ever satisfied with himself on this particular morning. Once more he had demonstrated the success resulting from the practice of his favorite motto, "Hang to it like grim death, and like grim death you'll conquer." Timosa was at last married. Heaven knew she was bound to silence now. She wouldn't be likely to tell her husband what a deceived lover he had been. She was much too cowardly for that. Poor little fool! It was hard not to feel contempt for a woman, even though she belonged to you. Soft, trembling, weeping little identities!

Burbank was glad that she was well married, and off to Europe on her bridal trip. She somehow angered him with her pale face and meek ways. Besides, she had been the cause of the only mystery that had ever become involved in his plans.

Secrets in his life there were many, but these only added a spice to existence. Mysteries, however, were not in his line. He preferred to hold the clue to all secrets. It was safer.

The outcome of that night at the farm was certainly unaccountable. He found it hard to doubt Adam, but what was he to make of the disappearance of the child? If he had ever suspected that Links had failed to make way with

it, he would not have been so rash as to discharge that old witch, the nurse, till he had satisfied himself that she knew nothing.

But, curse it all! what was the use of worrying about that? Adam had disappeared—deemed it best to get out of the way as soon as possible. There was no better proof that the fellow knew more than he confessed. To be sure, it had not been in his plan to lose his tool—but let him go! As to the old hag, Adam could not have been quite fool enough to let her know too much. In view of all these facts he would make himself easy about either of them ever daring to molest him further.

Filled with such reflections Burbank trod his way along through the hurrying crowd.

There was something eminently pleasing to Burbank about walking through these busy downtown streets. He made something of a study of his own individuality in this daily contact with his care-absorbed fellow-mortals, and the conclusions drawn from his observations were highly gratifying to his secret thoughts.

He never elbowed his way along as did some men, ducking hastily around corners, and slipping through sudden openings with a half-apologetic consciousness that another was thrust aside.

He amused himself by watching the unconscious concessions of other men to his peculiar personality. He always walked unswervingly forward with his firm, heel-heavy tread. As a rule, the crowd parted involuntarily to give him way, but, should some absorbed mortal escape the autocratic influence, he had but to fix him with his eyes and the man would move wonderingly aside.

So this morning he passed along. He was but a short

distance from his office, when his attention was suddenly arrested by a look of half-recognition in a pair of bleared eyes. The eyes belonged to a coarse, slatternly woman who was skulking her way through the throng.

Burbank gave an involuntary start, as she passed him, and turned unconsciously to follow her movements. Though yielding but an instant to his curiosity, he cursed himself for a fool when he saw that her eyes still held him, and noted that their expression changed instantly from one of half recognition to that of full comprehension.

He quickened his pace, but before he had taken three steps, the shuffling figure was plucking at his elbow, and in fawning tones claiming his recognition. He tried to push her off, giving her a savage glance from under his lowering brows, but she only clung the more persistently to his sleeve, and raised her voice to a shrill whine as she dogged his steps.

"You ain't forgot the old nurse what you had to your darter up in the country now, have you, Mr. Burbank?" she persisted, in tones intentionally audible to those about.

Burbank gnashed his teeth, as her identity forced itself upon him.

"Here, you old hag, take this!" he growled under his breath, "and be off instanter or I'll have a policeman after you."

"It ain't you that ought to be talkin' about settin' a policeman after honest folks, when you been murderin' your own grandson in the dead o'night. You ain't goin' to put me off with a quarter, now I've got ye!" she cried, shaking her coarse fist almost in his face.

Those about looked up startled. She was blocking the way. In a moment they would be surrounded by curious

spectators. Burbank was in front of his own office-door. With a curse he hissed to her to be quiet and pushed her, still expostulating, to his private door.

Once inside he turned the key and confronted her with a fierce threat of vengeance. But she was used to curses and threats. She was in no wise disturbed. It suited her, however, to change her tactics, and dropping her menacing tone she commenced in a wheedling voice,

"Now, Mr. Burbank, you ain't hurtin' nobody but yourself. If you'd jest been quiet and gentlemanlike, Polly Halsey wouldn't a-given you no trouble. 'Taint likely old Polly cares so much 'bout your puttin' the mite of a baby out o' the way. But rich folks like you ought to be willin' to pay a little somethin' for doin' things in their own way, spite o' laws and regulations. Poor folks like me generally pay for murders with their necks (making a ghastly gesture to intensify her meaning), but a little money'll go far towards gaggin' folks' mouths, for a rich man."

"You old hag, what cursed nonsense are you mouthing?" growled Burbank, advancing fiercely upon her.

Polly sidled furtively away from him, but her tongue never stopped.

"You ain't a-gettin' at what I'm sayin', man. I see'd the doctor when he slid off down the hall and left the baby in the old garret. I sez to myself, 'Now that's the last of that little young un, for sure'. But when I heerd it a-cryin' and a-whinin' after he'd gone off, I sensed right away that the doctor'd got scared and left the quieter for you. It wasn't many minutes 'fore I heerd you a-goin' down the narrow passage and I sez to myself, 'It'll be soothin' syrup this time for sure!' Worked like a charm didn't it! Never seed a grandfather take care of a young un so well. Never

heerd a sound after that dose of soothin' syrup, 'cept the grandfather tip-toein' away for fear o' wakin' it. I hadn't the heart to speak to you then, you'd done your work so nice. So I jest let you pass by the door, where I was a-peekin' through the crack, and never said a word."

Burbank grew livid with rage. "You lying beast," he hissed. "I'll turn you over to the authorities for black-mail, if it is the last thing I ever do."

"I'm used to the 'thorities, Mr. Burbank," was the maundering reply, while a sickly grin, which she meant to be a soothing smile, spread over her besotted features. "Now why can't you listen to a little reason? It ain't so much I want. And if I get my little pay, I ain't fer tellin' all I know and seen.—But if I don't (and her face took on an expression of wolfish ferocity) I'll make you dance all your way to hell, a-steppin' on hot coals. I ain't waited and kept still all this time for nothin'. Me and the doctor'll fix you yet. Ye ain't forgot the doctor, I s'pose," she sneered, shrewdly taking note of the sudden look of consternation on her victim's face.

Burbank felt unexpectedly helpless, but a quick thought struck him.

"See here, my good woman," he said, in a changed voice. "You have made a mistake in the way you have gone about things. Now I don't mind giving a little money for services rendered, and if you have come here to tell me what you know about Dr. Links, we'll begin to talk business. No doubt you thought you were making a good thing out of it when he hired you to come here and lay that child's disappearance at my door, but I'll make it far more worth your while to tell me the truth about the doctor. You know all that talk about seeing me go into the garret room is a d——

lie. Now out with the truth and I'll make you glad you came,"—and Burbank jingled suggestfully, the silver pieces in his trousers pocket.

At this turn of affairs, Polly appeared to be greatly moved to merriment.

She suddenly dropped down into Burbank's office-chair and began to shake, gurgle, and choke with laughter.

"And he says it's a lie," she cackled. "Eh, but he's a shrewd one, a-tryin' to get out o' me all I know and never payin' a cent down. The doctor'd have a fit if he sensed this thing"—and she leered at him out of the corner of her eye with a look that was positively devilish.

Burbank dug his nails into his palms in impotent rage. He felt himself cornered by this maudlin old creature—a woman! He felt a savage impulse to get his strong hands about her skinny neck and crush the secrets, with her life, out of ghastly being.

She might have comprehended the fierce malignity of his thoughts, for she ceased her chuckling and whimpered fawningly, "I ain't goin' to lie and say I didn't see you do it, nor get the doctor into trouble after he's been waitin' and planin' all these years, but there's just one old woman what knows the both of you like a book, and it's goin' to pay you to keep the peace atween us."

"As I told you before, I'll make it worth your while to tell me what you know about the doctor," said Burbank, crushing down his wrath. "Come, now, tell me where he is and what he's up to."

"Not much!" she replied tauntingly. "I ain't thought about it yet. I got to make up my mind whether this old woman makes anythin' by it. See? S'posin' you give me ten dollars to go home quiet-like and think about it."

"I'll give you twenty dollars to tell me where the doctor is and what he's doing," said Burbank, shaking two crisp ten-dollar bills before her greedy gaze.

Her lips trembled and her bleared eyes watered at the sight, but she shook her head and muttered, "No, No! I can't do it, I tell you, I can't do it!"

"Very well then," said Burbank determinedly. "Not a cent will you get for all your trouble this morning. Out of this now! And let me hear so much as a sound of these lies you have been telling me, and I'll find a way to silence your tongue. Hear me?" he cried, glowering down at her with ferocious menace in his eyes—"a deep, dark, lonely way to silence your tongue. Let me find that you have breathed a syllable of such blackmail outside and you'll be afraid to drink a drop of rum—it may be poisoned; you'll be afraid to venture out of your filthy den by day or night—there may be a dagger at your back. Out now! out! and never dare to show your face here again!" and he pushed her violently to the door.

"I ain't afraid of you," she whimpered. "I ain't afraid. You better give me somethin'. I'll have it out o' you sooner or later. I'll set them on your track what knows you, and what hates you. You won't never be a marchin' along the street so proud and so haughty-like again. You hadn't better fool with Polly Halsey now she——"

But he had taken his chances and shut the door in her face.

A moment later he saw her pass the window shaking her head and muttering excitedly to herself. He sat down in silence. Here indeed was a state of affairs which he had not bargained for. Could it be possible that Adam Links and this old hag were plotting to charge him with the direct murder

of the child. It looked like it. To be sure they could prove no such lie; but they could make him a vast amount of trouble. He had just congratulated himself that Adam was out of the way. Well, the wheel of fortune is forever turning. He must shadow the old woman and find Adam by her tracks. Luckily, he had the man for the work, but then—he usually had the man for the work. He smiled grimly as he began to feel himself once more master of the situation, and went stolidly to his morning tasks.

As for Polly Halsey, she cursed and flattered herself by turns.

“You never got a thing out o’ him you pesky, senseless old fool,” she muttered. “But then, you did yourself proud, Polly, when you hatched up the little yarn about the doctor. The old man wasn’t much afraid of Polly Halsey, but he was mighty skeered about the doctor, an’ ’tain’t everybody what would ’a’ thought of makin’ out that the doctor was in it. Oh, if I’d only knowed what to answer him when he asked what the doctor was up to, wouldn’t the old woman ’a’ been in clover for once! Two ten-dollar bills! Well, it was pretty tough, but I ain’t through with him yet! I allus knowed I’d make that brat turn me in a penny somehow. If I couldn’t do it when I had him in my hands, mebby I can do it now I’m rid of him. If old Halsey had a-lived a little longer he might a seen that Polly had a head on her, when she stole the young one, after all. I’ve touched the old grandfather on a sore spot, an’ now we’ll see, we’ll see!”

CHAPTER VII.

THE hour was late, but Burbank was still in his downtown office. By the expectant way in which any outside noise caused him to look toward the door, it was evident he was awaiting some one. Meanwhile he sat alone and thought.

His life was becoming a burden. Polly Halsey gave him no peace. She had not dared to come openly to his office, but she had dogged his footsteps on more than one occasion. A horrid feeling that she was never far away had taken possession of him. Then, too, he found that people with whom he had long associated began to regard him with curious and furtive glances, while some studiously avoided meeting him. Even his household servants had left him suddenly and without explanation. He felt a new atmosphere of distrust threatening his prospects, and traced it to the one unhealthy source he dreaded.

So far he had not yielded to Polly's demands for money, but he almost wished now that he had. It might have paid to keep her quiet till he had matured his plans to get rid of her altogether. By Heaven, that young hang-dog, Tim, would bestir himself to greater energy in the case. He didn't propose to wait much longer for results.

Burbank was plainly depressed. The heavy September storm which had been pouring down for two days had not served to raise his spirits. His patience had come to an end.

The scowl on his face did not lighten as he heard a peculiar rap outside, and it was a lowering visage the late caller confronted when the door was cautiously opened to admit him.

"Late again!" was the savage greeting bestowed, as the irate man shot a high-legged stool across the floor with a blow from his heavy boot. "Sit down there and give an account of yourself!"

The person addressed shrugged his shoulders and perched himself obediently upon the high seat. His long rain-coat almost touched the floor, dripping little streams of muddy water in a circle about him. A slouch-rimmed rubber hat was pulled down about his ears. From beneath this dripping covering a pair of shrewd, evil eyes looked out of a face prematurely old and hardened in sin.

Meeting Burbank's angry eyes, the young man (for young he was) bethought himself to pull off his wet hat, by which act he disclosed a face repulsive both in features and expression.

The brow was low and contracted, and the hair hung over it in thin, shaggy locks. The nose was of negro type and ill suited to the small square face. The mouth was wide and brutal, the teeth tusk-like and grimy. A week's growth of youthful beard was on lip and chin.

Gazing at his master with a look which suggested unnameable thoughts within, he waited to be importuned still further for his news.

"The devil take you!" cried Burbank, furious at his silence. "Stop that ghastly grinning. Say what you have to say and be off!"

"Can't say that I knowed I was grinnin'," muttered the youth, gathering up with an effort the corners of his loose

mouth. "Not much to grin about over this night's dirty job, 'nless I caught it from the old woman herself when she was a-goin' down."

"What do you mean?" queried Burbank, moving uneasily in his chair.

"Mean! Well, I mean that the old woman ain't likely to bother you no more, right away."

"Where is she?" demanded Burbank bending anxiously forward.

"Hist!" whispered the youth, slipping down from his stool and glancing furtively in every direction, before he ventured to speak.

"Would ye be knowin' where Newtown Creek is now?"

Burbank nodded his head.

"That's it! Ye know the dirty place, the big vats and the towerin' chimneys, the smoke and the smell and the black stinkin' water. That's where she is,"—and he thrust his evil face close to Burbank's and leered into his eyes.

Burbank struck him fiercely aside. "Keep your distance and explain yourself!" he ordered in a low, savage tone.

"I've done cleaner work for more thanks and better pay," growled Tim sullenly. "It ain't likely I knocked the old woman into the dirty hole for nothin', and I'll be hanged if I think a feller what can do a job like that need to stan' bein' kicked round like a dog."

"Is she dead, Tim?" muttered Burbank fearfully.

"That she is, sur!" declared Tim, his good-humor evidently restored by the remembrance. "She was so loaded with rum she could hardly navigate. She was a-walkin' mighty close to the edge, and seein' her there, made me think of somethin' all to wonce. I jest give her a sudden clip, so—and over she went. I thought first the old thing

was a-goin' to float, the water was thick enough to boost anything, but when she began to flop and git her nose full of the sickenin' stuff, she jest cut in like a knife, and first thing I knowed—she was gone !”

Tim's ghastly gestures pictured the scene all too vividly. Burbank shuddered and grew pale.

“ You had no orders from me for that !” he said sternly, drawing a deep breath.

“ It didn't need no special orders to know what you wanted,” returned Tim with an impudent sneer.

“ Be careful, sir,” growled Burbank, with a piercing look. “ Remember I sent you to find out about the doctor—nothing more.”

“ There wan't nothing to find out about the doctor's far as I can tell. The old woman was a-bluffin' ye, I'm thinkin', an' no mistake. There ain't bin no sign of the doctor all the time I've bin on to the old woman. She was a-bluffin' ye for sure !”

“ You're a cursed impudent fool to have done away with the old woman and left me in ignorance of what she carried in her head. I could have you hanged for this !”

“ Ye could, ahey !” sneered Tim backing away. “ I'm a-thinkin' ye're off your bearin's there. I jest got a little information fer my own pickin's afore I give her a taste o' creek slime ; an' I didn't presume to tell ye 'bout doin' up the old drunk till I knowed who I was a-talkin' to.”

“ You insolent cur !” hissed Burbank, his face purple with suppressed rage.

“ You druv me to it,” returned Tim doggedly. “ I ain't a-goin' to be made a cat's-paw 'thout takin' care to hev my mittens ready. 'Tain't reasonable. It'll be a mighty sight easier to do your regular bizness now I know 'bout the baby

gittin' soothin' syrup from its granddad. It'll make us pull kinder evenner in the harness not to have the whip all to one side."

Burbank's face changed from angry purple to deadly white, but he controlled himself with a mighty effort.

"That story is a lie, a d—— lie out and out," he said fiercely. "You've made the greatest mistake of your life when you thought to frighten me with such a yarn. I'm not easily scared, you blackguard. Look to yourself now if you don't hanker for the hangman's noose."

"You don't look skeered, Mr. Burbank. I'm sure you don't look skeered," leered and chuckled the undismayed tool of Burbank's latest selection. "Ye better think it all out afore mornin'—an' don't forget I may know some things you ain't onto. Mebbe you ain't in the mood for payin' me somethin' on my evenin's work, but the score can stan' till—say about to-morrow mornin'."

"You scurvy dog! don't dare to show your face here to-morrow, or this week. Take this, and remember I'm paying you for your time, not your work. You deserve to hang for this night's job!"

He tossed a roll of bills into the dirty, outstretched hand.

Tim received his pay without thanks, and giving one last leer at his conquered master, shuffled off down the hall.

He had not reached the outer door, when a low voice called after him, "Tim, Tim! come back a minute!"

Tim sullenly retraced his footsteps.

"I thought ye was a-groanin' to git red o' me," he muttered.

"Tim, is the body out of sight? Is it likely to come to the top?"

"Sure it's out of sight. Tain't likely the old witch'll ever

be seen or heerd tell of agin, an' what if she is? she ain't no account to no one. I ain't afraid there'll be much money spent on findin' out how she got there—and sech things ain't done 'thout money.”

“Tim, where are you going?”

“To the lodgin' house, I reckon. Why?”

“Well, I—I thought I might take a run out to Hunter's Point to look round a bit. You can go with me and show me the bearings of Newtown Creek.”

“Jest as you say,” said Tim, grinning furtively.

A moment later the two went out together into the pouring rain and made their way to the noisome locality which had been the scene of Tim's boasted exploits.

When they reached the foot of Thirty-fourth Street, the ferry-boat was in the slip. The two had been walking abreast through the dimly-lighted streets, but as Burbank passed through the gates of the ferry-house, he motioned his companion to a place behind him; and buttoning up his long rain-coat, walked over the deck and into the cabin with his usual proud, dignified step.

Tim slunk along some distance behind him and dropped into an obscure corner farthest from the commanding presence. After they were seated, his master did not deign so much as a glance in his direction, which left him free to indulge his secret mood.

A peculiar merriment seemed to seize him at intervals. His narrow shoulders shook, and once he was obliged to snatch off his hat, in order to conceal with it the grin which would come to his face.

But at last the boat grated against the creaking piles of her wharf, and the two were free to pursue their investigation.

It was Tim who led the way now, and he picked his way

carefully down the railroad tracks, through the thick fog which had finally succeeded the steady rain.

Burbank was not familiar with the loathsome place into which he was being led, and his gorge rose as the over-powering stench from the glue-shops and oil-vats assailed his nostrils.

At last Tim came to a standstill on the grimy bank of the fetid stream which daily received to itself the noxious waste of the shops.

The water was no longer water, but stagnant filth, black as midnight and choked with corruption. Vile fumes rose from its reeking bosom and the old rotting crafts lay like dead carcasses in the putrid slime of this city cesspool.

Tim grasped Burbank's sleeve and muttered excitedly, "Here's the place! In she went, right here!"

"Hist! Stop your pointing!" whispered Burbank, glancing anxiously about him. "Are you sure this is the very place?"

"Dead sure," replied Tim with evident enjoyment. "They ain't likely to dig her out o' this rot d'ye think?" Wouldn't be s'prised if there was one bed o' snakes down there big enough to swallow the old drunk at a gulp."

"Curse you, hold your tongue!" growled Burbank under his breath. "I wouldn't have believed you were such a devil. You haven't any more feeling than a beast."

"You wouldn't 'a' believed you got the very thing you bargained for, eh? Well, I don't wonder, fer ye got it dirt cheap. Well, I s'pose you're satisfied now she's out o' your way. Look a here, Mr. Burbank! See here! See!"

"What?" whispered his companion, shivering with sudden alarm

"D'ye see them lights a pointin' their great long fingers down into the nasty hole?"

"Silence, you fool!" hissed Burbank, but he looked anxiously back.

From the surrounding houses the window lights gleamed through the thick fog with magnified brightness. Long rays streamed out and pierced down, down into the black impurities of the stagnant filth, as though to lay bare the secret abominations of its loathsome bosom.

"Scared at last and by nothing but a reflection, are you!" he sneered.

"I ain't so scared," whined Tim with pretended fear, "but it's an omen, an' mebbe the whole thing 'll be dug up some day. I ain't sorry I know about that little affair o' yours, though. It ain't more'n nat'ral to look out for number one in this world, and I reckon you an' me'll have to stick together after this, eh, pard?"

"You insolent cur!" cried Burbank choking with fury. "I'll teach you one lesson before you are many days older."

Tim chuckled to himself as he branched off to his lodgings in one of the low dens near the Hunter's Point station. He chuckled more audibly as he got out of Burbank's hearing, and said approvingly to himself, "Tim, you're a sleek one. I'll be hanged if the old man didn't swaller the bait with a gulp. It's clean down, and it'll crawl in his stomach for many a long day, I'm thinkin'. A feller's got to have wit to keep up with them sharpers,—and, Tim, my boy, you've got it."

* * * * *

If Burbank could have seen into Tim's mind that night, he would not have wended his way home with feelings so unlike his usual mood of calm self-confidence.

But it was not for him to know what we have already surmised, that shrewd Tim had invented the whole story of

Polly's violent death in order to wield a certain influence which he had not before possessed.

The facts were simple and natural enough. Tim had been set by Burbank to watch Polly Halsey's movements, and find out, if possible, what relations existed between her and Dr. Links.

Instead of spying upon Polly according to Burbank's directions, the wily youth had finally taken her into his confidence. Together they were plotting to extort from Burbank systematic payments for secrecy, when a third attack of delirium tremens carried the miserable old woman off, and the field was left clear to Tim.

Tim had no doubt whatever that Burbank was the murderer of his grandson. Polly Halsey had dwelt upon the fabrication of Burbank's administering the "soothin' syrup" so long that she had come to believe it herself. And it was thus that she had given the story to Tim, though she confessed that she knew nothing of the whereabouts of Dr. Links.

At first Tim was quite dismayed by Polly's death. But it was not long before his fertile brain had conceived the scheme which would make his master and himself mutually dependent upon each other for secrecy. He reasoned that it would be impossible for Burbank to bring him to justice without an exposure of too many of his own life secrets. While, if ever this consideration should fail to be his protection, he knew means by which old Polly's natural death could be easily proven. Thus he would clear himself, while Burbank could not fail to be well punished for his attempted revenge.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE closing of the war had brought peace to the country districts as well as tranquillity to the city.

Those that were spared came back to their loved ones with sadly aged hearts and maimed limbs. Those that never returned, still lived supreme in the bleeding hearts of the loved ones left behind.

The bruised country tried to forgive and forget, and the budding spring strove tenderly to aid.

Teddy had come back. One sleeve was empty, but the dear brave heart was beating there safe and sound. They cried over him and thanked God.

"And who's this young man, pray?" asked the soldier son when he caught sight of the little boy with the big brown eyes and curly black hair. "He seems mightily at home here!"

"And so he is, to be sure!" replied Father Bearall, tossing the child playfully to his shoulder. "This is our little boy, Wilton, ain't you now, sonny?"

"Sonny," holding on to his protector's gray hair with one chubby hand, nodded a solemn assent.

"I've a good mind to be jealous of him," laughed the soldier. "My, but he's a beauty! I declare I'd forgotten all about the little chap, though Milly did write me."

"He's nowhere near so handsome as you was, Teddy," declared his partial mother. "You never had no doll-face, but for knowin' looks and smart ways that child can't hold a candle to you! Your powers of imitation was wonderful,

When you was six weeks old you heard an old rooster crowin' out in the yard, and you jest lifted up your head and imitated him exact. You was allus ahead o' time, like your mother. I've heard poor father tell, many a time, how Catharine nussed her mother through a whole fit of sickness when she was only two years old."

Teddy and his father exchanged glances, but long experience saved them from the folly of a contradiction, and the subject was judiciously changed.

The next day was little Wilton's birthday.

The poor child, being innocent of both name and birthday, when he entered his new home, had both immediately bestowed upon him by the practical Bearalls.

The day set had rolled round again for the third time, now, since he had been with them. It was the fifth of May and he was supposed to be five years old.

This birthday was a great event in little Wilton's life. In the first place, he had on his first pair of "pants," diminutive affairs to be sure, but still "pants." More than that, distinguished "pants," for they were home-spun, home-made, and a pair of Teddy's in the bargain.

Mother Bearall explained so impressively how Teddy had worn them to church, "bran new," the first time he went, and how still he sat—"so still you could a-heard a pin drop anywhere around him"—that poor Wilton felt, for the first hour of his new glory, that if he presumed to move or make a sound the "pants" would cry out in horror.

After the first hour, which was not all misery, since he sat with his chubby hands crammed to the bottoms of the wonderful pockets, he tried them gently and furtively. He stretched out one fat little leg—the "pants" made no sign. He slipped down off of the chair holding his breath—still no

sign. He ran quickly around the room and stopped short with a gasp, grabbing frantically at the baggy fullness at the back as if he would stifle it—not a sound. With a mild “whoop” he tore out of the house and was off to the barn like a shot to show them to his beloved ducklings.

The waddling brood poured into his lap as he sat down on the ground and called to them.

As they swarmed about him, one little downy week-old duckling fell over backward and lay helpless with its small webbed feet kicking the air. Wilton’s face fell. The first thorn in his trowsered glory had made itself felt.

This particular little biped had been hatched upside down (so the hired man said knowingly), and, like mortals thus handicapped from the beginning, had never been able to get its proper equipoise. It would go along for a few steps pretty straight, then all at once the earthward attraction would prove too great and the yellow legs would be helplessly waving in air.

The boy had been a needed foster-mother to this unfortunate little duckling. It angered him to see the old duck waddle indifferently off and leave her offspring upside down upon the ground. His childish heart swelled at her unworthiness, and he had offered her many an example of better conduct (to which she was equally indifferent), sitting flat on the ground with his tired little legs doubled under him, and the poor duckling sheltered and right side up beneath his skirts.

But “*pants!*” Alas, the poor bird had lost its mother!

“Wilton! Wilton!” called Mother Bearall’s strong voice from the kitchen door. “Hurry in this minute! Quick!”

The boy dropped everything and ran in as fast as his little legs would carry him.

“Come, child, I forgot all about your startin’ for school

this morning. You're five years old to-day, and you mustn't be let to stay out o' school another day. My Teddy and Milly went to school the minute they was five years old, both of 'em, and I've got to do my duty by you, though you can't expect to hold a candle to them with their pedigree as well as bringin' up. Pedigree's a great thing! I never could of expected to be what I am, if it hadn't a-been for my father bein' what he was. He was a man of insight, he was! He saw right through me from the first.

"Many a time I've heerd him say, 'There don't nothin' go to sleep around Catharine!' and no more there don't, as even Grandpa Bearall, with all his slow ways and un-thinkin' head, will allow. It's a blessed good thing for some people that St. Luke didn't neglect to write down them words of the Master, 'But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.' It don't stand to reason that a person with no better father an' mother than gutter-dust can be expected to know things like people that have had fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers for generations back. I intend to do my duty by you and lay on the stripes, if need be, to make you know right from wrong, but if you go wrong in the end, it's a comfort to know that the Lord will take it into consideration what kind o' dust you was made out of."

The child listened to this expository harangue in his usual solemn silence.

As Mother Bearall worked even faster than she talked, the little fellow was soon ready for school with his tin dinner-pail on his arm.

As he trudged off, Father Bearall, who had been listening to his wife's remarks over the top of his newspaper, said thoughtfully,

"I don't believe, mother, I'd say much to Wilton about his bein' picked up in the gutter, if I was you. You know his feelin's are easily hurt, for a child, and he's old enough now to understand every word. I shouldn't be s'prised anyway if he come of pretty good stock somewhere. He ain't no common child, it's easy 'nough seen."

"There can't nobody tell me my duty to that child, Isaac Bearall! If 't hadn't been for me, that child would 'a' been in the asylum, or somewhere worse, yet. There ain't no use a-fetchin' him up with a wrong idee about his pedigree, and what's more, I won't have it. Pedigree will allus crop out and he might as well know what to be lookin' for. I don't suppose now you've ever looked into them things, but father allus brought me up to be observin'. I s'pose now you've never thought much about Jacob and the streaked rods, have you?"

"I ain't thought about it no more'n I had to," acknowledged the old man. "I allus felt as though it was a pretty 'shisterin' trick of Jacob's, and not the first one he played either. I never thought he had more'n his reasonable come-upin's when Laban fooled him about Rachel," he continued doggedly.

"Lord ha' mercy on him!" cried his wife, with hands in air and nothing but the whites of her eyes visible, "and him a blasphemin' of the Holy Scriptures at his age. Lord forbid, lest the devil and his angels swallow him up body and soul!"

"Don't be a-feared, Catharine," said the old man dryly. "'Twouldn't be wo'th their while. I wouldn't be a morsel apiece 'round for 'em."

"You'll see! you'll see, Father Bearall!" cried his wife warningly. "If it was me, I should feel my soul a-quakin' and my bones a-crackin'. Lord 'a' mercy! Bring him to the

mercy seat with the thunder and the lightnin' of Thy strong arm !”

The bean-pot on the stove sizzled over on the freshly blacked hearth, and Heaven and Hades were forgotten in a second.

The steaming pot came off with a jerk and the stove-lid flew into place with a slam.

“For mercy sake, couldn't you even see that bean-pot was nigh on to boilin' over ?” she snapped caustically. “I've got to be eyes, ears, hands, feet, and soul into the bargain, in this family !”

“I was lookin' for the devil and his angels, mother,” replied her husband, “and I'll be switched if I expected to find 'em in the bean-pot.”

Wilton trudged off bravely to school, his little heart beating anxiously under his new jacket.

Before he reached the bottom of the hill, he heard a familiar “quack, quack,” behind him and turned quickly to find the whole brood, mother duck and ducklings, following him.

He tried to drive them back, with much shaking of his little arms and kicking of his little legs. As he did so, the unlucky weakling turned legs up as usual. The mother duck waddled over and pecked viciously at it with her maternal bill.

Wilton whipped her off in a rage, and then fell to wondering what he should do to protect his little favorite till his return.

A thought struck him. He drew out a piece of cord, with which he had stuffed his pocket, and carrying the soft little bird tenderly with him as far as the brook, he tied her by the leg to a twig on the bank. She couldn't turn over with

so short a string, he thought, and she would find enough to eat and to drink close around her.

Then he trudged on again, quite satisfied. The flock persisted in following him. He drove them back with much scolding and tremendous exertions of his little body, but the minute he ceased his efforts they closed around him again, pecking familiarly at his shoe-lacings.

Wilton knew he had lost too much time already, and his heart swelled with a feeling of anxiety and a sense of many burdens, which the joy of the "new pants" almost failed to assuage.

There was no help for it, and he drew up red and breathless at the door of the school-house with his unwelcome feathered family clustered about his feet.

He was late. The schoolhouse door was closed and the hum of voices wandered out to him through an immense crack in the lower panel.

With his choking little heart almost in his mouth he knocked timidly. Once! Twice!

At the second summons, the door opened and a pleasant-faced, gentle-looking lady, past middle life, smiled down on the trembling little figure and its unique retinue.

"Well, little boy, have you come to school?" she asked kindly, as Wilton tried blushing to drive away his presumptuous followers.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, almost crying with excitement and mortification. "I couldn't keep the little ducks home. They ran after me, and wouldn't 'shoo,'" and he looked up at her with anxious apprehension.

"Well, I guess we can manage that," she said reassuringly, and she sent one of the big boys out to tether the mother duck to a ring in the coal-bin.

"Now, I guess you'll find all the little ducklings safe to take home with you!" she said, smiling at Wilton who was now feeling quite comforted.

"What is your name, little boy?"

"Wilton Gutterdust Bearall," replied the child primly.

"Wilton what?" asked the teacher in astonishment.

"Wilton Gutterdust Bearall," repeated the child slowly and carefully, bent on making a good first impression in matters of education.

The puzzled lady was on the point of asking the child how he spelled it, but bethought herself in time of his tender age, —and "Wilton Gutterdust Bearall" went down on the school record in the teacher's small, precise hand.

The boy had a very pleasant day of it. The other children taking upon themselves airs of great importance, as more sophisticated than he, vied with each other in attentions to the "new scholar." In return for which civilities he emptied his dinner-pail among them, forgetting his own hunger in pride of seeing them devour his gift.

School once out, Wilton hastened home in company with the other scholars, but closely followed by his ducks. When he came in sight of his own home he parted hastily from his companions and started on a run for the brook. Stooping down breathlessly to the spot where he had tied his little favorite, he found it upside down in the water, dead. It had pulled up the little twig and lay drowned in its natural element.

Wilton burst into tears and ran toward the house crying, "Grandpa, grandpa!" between his sobs.

Grandpa came out of the barn with a foaming pail of milk in his hand. He set it down and gathered the weeping child in his arms.

"What is it, bubby? What have they been doin' to you? Tell grandpa!"

Wilton held out the little dead bird and poured his sorrows into a sympathetic ear.

"I ought to stayed home and took care of it," he sobbed, "and now it's dead!"

"There, sonny, never mind now!" said the good man soothingly. "The little duck would never 'a' lived to be growed up anyway. It wasn't hatched right in the fust place. It would 'a' had a hard time if it had 'a' lived. Seems sometimes as though critters knowed more about some things than we do. Things that's born wrong among them don't never seem to live an' suffer. Things that's born wrong around us mortals seem almost surer to live than them that's born right—specially if they've born wrong in their souls. Lord 'a' massy, but this is a queer world, a queer world!"

Which soliloquy soared rather far above Wilton's comprehension. But his tired head was leaning against Grandpa Bearall's shoulder, and his sore heart was beating against an answering heart, full of tender sympathy, which was solace far better than words.

That night after little Wilton was tucked safely into bed, and Mother Bearall was knitting away on the other side of the table, Father Bearall took up his paper as usual to read his wife the news.

"Well, Mother," he said, after glancing it over, "here is something that will interest you." And he read the long account of a brilliant wedding. Timosa, daughter of D. A. Burbank and Leon de Monteano being the contracting parties.

"That's him," he said, "that's his name and his initials, but I never knowed he had a daughter."

CHAPTER IX.

THE Civil War was no sooner ended than inquiries began to arrive from the North as to hotel accommodations in St. Augustine for the coming winter. So rapidly does this fickle world adjust itself to altered circumstances.

Soon the sounds of busy preparation were heard, and when the season opened, among the first to arrive in the quaint old town were Leon de Monteano and his wife.

The bridal trip had had its sunshine and its shade, but the search for health had not proved quite successful. Timosa was still slight and pale, and the freedom and abandon of healthy, youthful spirits seemed never to have taken possession of her, while the ominous roses yet bloomed fitfully on De Monteano's thin, spiritual face, and his narrow chest was tormented with a dry, hacking cough to which he proudly refused to pay much heed.

The young couple were wearied with change and travel. De Monteano, especially, longed for the rest and quiet of his beautiful home in beloved St. Augustine.

A trip to Florida directly after the war was not the easy thing it is nowadays, with our hard-bed, level railroads, our luxurious drawing-room cars, and comfortable sleeping compartments.

It was almost three years before the southern railroads were considered quite safe, and De Monteano and his wife were obliged to travel by water, taking the Inland Water Route—a trip of seventy-five hours, at least, in fair weather.

They had returned to New York the first of January, and now, about a month later, were nearing the close of their journey South to take up winter residence in St. Augustine.

The steamer had landed them at Picolata; from which little town they were slowly making a rough trip overland in a lumbering old stage-coach. Flat woods, belts of rich hummock, and beds of palmetto scrub all had their successive charm for De Monteano's partial eyes, half assuaging, for him, the discomforts of the jolting trip.

Not so his wife. She leaned back wearily in the far corner of the seat and followed the noiselessly gliding panorama of the monotonous landscape, with dull eyes.

She had drawn off her gloves, and her delicate hands lay listlessly at rest upon her lap. Suddenly the brilliant jewel of her betrothal ring caught one of the sun's glittering rays and flashed its prismatic splendors into her very eyes. She started from her reverie as if stung, and hastily turned the sparkling offender into the palm of her hand, crushing it savagely against the tender flesh, while a red glow crimsoned for a moment the paleness of her cheek. The blue eyes, no longer lifeless, glanced furtively at De Monteano's averted face, then dropped their shamed lids in quick relief.

Presently, De Monteano, who had been watching the familiar scene, with an expression of quiet happiness upon his face, leaned forward and, covering his wife's hand with his own warm clasp, looked up into her face and said gently—

"Shall you like it, Timosa?"

"No doubt, if we are to live here and if it is to do you good, Leon," she answered listlessly, while her soft hand rested inert and unresponsive beneath his.

"But shall you not like it a little for your own sake?" he urged, a shade of disappointment passing over his face.

"Are places so different then, Leon?" she asked. "It seems only ourselves that change—to me."

"I am glad you said that, Timosa. It helps me—in what I want to say," he replied, regarding her with an expression of mingled tenderness and anxiety.

She raised her drooping eyelids and glanced timidly into his face.

"I'm not going to scold, *mi amada*," he said with a smile. "I just want to say a few candid words, and ask a few frank questions, which I hope you will answer as frankly and unreservedly."

She swept him a half-startled glance, and then dropped her eyes again, while a painful flush suffused her features, then suddenly faded, leaving her cheek colorless.

"O Timosa!" he said reproachfully, "why will you seem to fear me so? I have so many heart-thoughts to ask and to give. May I never express them without startling and paining you?"

"Nothing you could say would be undeserved," she replied nervously, seeking to control the trembling of her lips.

"O child, you do trouble me!" he broke out with a half groan. "Why will you seem to feel that I shall load you with reproaches as if for some great crime! If I venture ever upon personal grounds, you fly from me like something frightened. Why will you not share your inmost thoughts and feelings with me, Timosa? I love your very secret soul, which your shyness and strange fear seem to hide forever out of sight. Can you not forget your father's stern sway and believe that I, your husband, could never ask anything but in tenderest love? This is all I wanted to say to you,

you poor little one.—Will you not, in this, our new home, give me all of yourself—all?”

He stopped abruptly and turned his dark eyes upon hers with a look of passionate appeal—of intense hope.

She lifted her face and gazed into his with that strange, fixed, fascinated attention he had seen once before. Her parted lips were motionless and her face was drawn and ghastly pale.

“Timosa!” he whispered, with shocked insistence, “Timosa!”

An expression of fear and anguish passed like a cloud over her features, then she drew a quick sharp sigh, and sank back against the cushioned seat as if exhausted, while the blood came slowly back to her lips.

Her husband bent over her anxiously. “Are you ill, *tierno bien mio*? Have I distressed you so? Forgive me. Think no more of it. What a brute a man is! Did you think I wanted to eat your little heart because I wanted you to give it all to me? You look better now. You are better, are you not? A sorry dog I am, to be sure, to take care of such a sensitive little wife. There, lean your head against my arm and rest.”

She obeyed him almost shrinkingly and he sat for a long time looking down at her with a troubled, anxious expression upon his mobile face.

It was well on to evening when the lights of St. Augustine welcomed the travelers home.

It had been De Monteano's fondest dream that before they should cross the threshold of this, their new home, that strange reserve which seemed to fall like a somber curtain between their lives should have been swept away.

But now he heaped reproaches on his own head for his

tactlessness, for his foolish fancies; and wrapped the beloved of his heart still more tenderly in the embrace of his unselfish affection.

Everything was in readiness. An old colored servant stood at the outer entrance of their little fortress and welcomed them in, his honest face beaming with satisfaction and pride. As the heavy, iron-barred gate closed after them and shut them safely out from the encroaching street, De Monteano drew a long breath of contentment; and linking his wife's arm through his own, drew her under the shadow of the deep arched portico and bade her look out upon the court.

The high enclosing wall was covered with dark green trailing vines and flanked with waving palms. In the shadowy corners, four majestic magnolias did duty as sentinels, while upon one wall a neighboring orange tree rested its glossy arms heavy with red-gold oranges. In the center of the court played rhythmically a half-hidden fountain, spouting slender crystal streams from its lily-cup throats, while close beside them a lusty trumpet-vine, glowing with its scarlet blossoms, climbed fearlessly over the arched portico and draped the columns and spandrils of the loggia overhead.

The crescent moon hung pale in the shifting skies, with a half-transparent, phosphorescent glow, and the soothing, velvety air passed noiselessly in and out the dark bowers, perfuming its path with the faint odor of bursting orange blossoms.

Timosa's wide blue eyes gathering in all the proud luxuriance of the tropical vegetation, then sweeping beyond it to the cold white span of the far-off satellite, returned at length dimmed with a vague, mist-like blurr. Then she shivered a little and said wearily, "It is all very beautiful—and so far away—like a dream."

"There, you are already affected by the sentiment of the place," said her husband happily. "That is just what I want. I am tired of the rush and roar of the world. Here we shall be 'far away like a dream,' you and I, Timosa. I've always longed for this moment, darling, when I should stand here under the shadow of my own doorway with my wife--my very own."

He drew her for a moment to his breast in silent content, and then released her with a word of anxious self-reproach. "There, I have kept you standing here without a thought of how weary you must be. Run up to the dear little room I have fitted for you and come down by and by rested and happy," he continued cheerfully. "You will find everything to your hand."

Timosa, dismissing her maid at the door, closed and fastened it carefully. After which she quietly removed her wraps and laid them neatly upon a chair--she had something of her father's methodical precise habits. Then she gave one haunted glance about the room as though it were an iron cage from which she longed to flee, and threw herself upon the bed, face downward. No sound escaped her, she did not sob or moan--long years of repression had given her too much control for that,--but shudder after shudder passed over her slender frame. After a while they ceased, and she lay there motionless as the dead. The little French clock ticked sociably upon the broad mantel over the fireplace, the light woodfire crackled noisily on the hearth, and a mocking-bird hanging in the window cocked his head jauntily from side to side, cracked his seed-shells and chirped thoughtfully in greeting, but she gave no heed. By and by she rose, stood for one moment beside the bed with an expression of dull anguish upon her drawn face, then sank upon

her knees before the grate. Hastily tearing open the bosom of her gown, she drew therefrom a small photograph, at which she gazed long and passionately with burning eyes and deep inhaled breath, as though she would draw the very image up into the fibers of her own being. Then she pressed her dry lips upon it again and again, while her kneeling figure swayed to and fro as in a rude wind. Suddenly she thrust out her arm, suspended the picture above the hot blaze, and opened her fingers. The writhing, hungry flames received it exultingly, and lapped at it with their forked tongues. It coiled away in shrinking terror, at which they all sprang upon it in one tangled, distorted mass, till, in a sudden swirl, the last ashes flew shuddering up the dark chimney, still pursued by the hungry flames.

With a shriek Timosa grasped frantically after the gray dust of her departing life—and fell backward in a swoon upon the floor.

De Monteano, waiting impatiently below, heard the sharp cry and sprang up the stairs two steps at a bound. He shook the bolted door distractedly and called fearfully to his wife. There was no reply. Once more he battered the unyielding barrier with frenzied violence, throwing his frail weight against it again and again, while his voice rang loudly for help.

His startled tones at length aroused her. She drew a long quivering sigh of returning consciousness, and, slowly raising upon her elbow, gradually realized the meaning of the tumult without.

Making a desperate effort she called feebly, "Yes, Leon!" and made her way dizzily to the door. Her trembling fingers finally succeeded in withdrawing the bolt, and her husband sprang eagerly to her side.

"What has happened, Timosa? Tell me what has happened?" he panted, supporting her swaying figure in his arms. Her drooping head sank languidly upon his breast where he tenderly sustained it, as she said faintly, "Only a sudden fainting fit. I must have been overworn."

"But what ails your hands?" he asked anxiously, noting her wince of pain as she pressed her palms unconsciously together.

"I think they must be burned, I was very near the fire," she replied apologetically.

"Good Heavens, Timosa!" exclaimed her husband, drawing her closer to him with a shudder of horror. What awful thing have you escaped—and on the very night of our home-coming! It makes my blood run cold. Why, you have not even changed your gown! You poor child, I believe I must never leave you a moment again. You need me!"

Timosa lifted her head from his breast and looked up at him appealingly.

"Do you need me, Leon?" she asked tremblingly. "Do you surely need me?"

"How can you ask?" he answered a little sadly. Can I never make you believe how all in all you are to me? "Can you not judge by your own feelings?"

She looked away from him with the far off expression he both loved and dreaded, saying solemnly, "I do need you, Leon, I need you more, more than you know. But you are so strong and pure, so good and true. How can you need me? I am a coward, Leon. I have always been. It is an awful sin to be a coward—and awful suffering."

"You shall not be a coward any longer then," he cried, joyously, almost overcome with happiness at the unusual breaking away of her reserve. "Come, now, what possible

fear have you rankling in your mind at this moment? A fear of big brawny me?" he asked gayly, capturing her wandering gaze with the loving persistence of his deep brown eyes.

She started a little with a half-sigh and said with a daring that was new to her, "I might have a brain fever and tell you all my secrets."

"Oh, how dreadful!" he replied, with mock solemnity. Then with caressing tenderness—"Tell them all to me now, darling, then you will fear no longer."

Timosa looked at him with a quick yearning sadness in her eyes and said gently:

"Leon, I always believe in God and Heaven when I look at you. How impossible it would be for you to be anything but transparently honorable and truthful. You are my Faith, Hope and—Charity," she added, swallowing a lump in her throat.

"Oh, Timosa! you probe my heart with its own unworthiness, but you make me inexpressibly happy. Let me say it over, darling, for I like the later version better,—'Your Faith, Hope—and Love,'" and his eager heart drank in and repeated over and over his own fondly distorted interpretation of her words—Faith, Hope and Love—and Love.

De Monteano closed his eyes that night with a feeling of new happiness and relief. Few, very few had been the words of love he had ever been able to coax from Timosa's lips. She always yielded to his caresses with childlike gentleness, but her thoughts seemed to wander from him, and he felt, instinctively, that it was always a yielding and never an advance on her part.

During their courtship he had attributed this reserve to excessive shyness, and the natural timidity which had been

so fostered by her severe father's rule ; at the same time his own warm heart had been so overflowing with love that he had been in a great measure blinded by the fullness of its passion. With daily and hourly intercourse her unresponsive shyness now became inexplicable to him, and sadly troubled his sensitive heart. What was his joy, then, that Timosa should have said to him of her own free will, and while looking with half tearful eyes straight into his own, " You are my Faith—Hope—and Love,"—or so his beating heart interpreted it. What could mortal man ask more?

But the morrow came full of the flooding sunshine of the sunny South. It found its reflected image in De Monteano's heart. He wakened his sleeping wife with a long, fervent kiss. She started from her slumbers with a beautiful smile of recognition wreathing her lips. His heart gave a great throb of tumultuous joy,—but the glad, unusual smile faded quickly beneath his ardent gaze, and the curtain of her drooping eyelids fell once more between them. He flushed painfully in the bitterness of his disappointment, and the happy words of greeting died upon his lips.

All day long he mused over the sudden change of her face. The more he thought of it the more he became convinced that in some unaccountable way he had failed to make his wife happy. He turned his heart inside out in his searching analysis of his own motives and acts. Finding nothing that he could justly condemn in these, he reproachfully decided that he was far too fanciful (a theory already well-worn), and promised himself that he would take his own heart into better training.

But Timosa seemed to realize her own coldness of the morning and was thoughtfully, almost tenderly, attentive through the whole day. Anticipating every desire that might

add to his physical comfort, gratifying every personal taste in her dress, in the arrangement of her hair, ministering to his every temporal want, kindly solicitous for his health,—perfect in everything but the demonstrative love he craved.

So they lived on through the winter months. De Monteano, who had but few demands of business to take up his time during this season, devoted himself exclusively to his wife's pleasure. They spent much time sailing on the usually peaceful waters of the Matanzas River, they took frequent trips under the overhanging banks of the Ocklawaha and down the broad waters of the St. John's. They spent hours on Anastasia Island, leaning against the great sand hummocks topped by half buried palmettoes ; watching the grand sweep of the blue ocean on its hard shell-strewn beach, or following the white sails and restless sea-gulls skimming lightly on the dark bosom of the boundless sea.

De Monteano had tried faithfully and sadly to school himself against asking the tenderly personal questions, and soliciting the wifely demonstrations which so quickly brought that look of fear and strained anxiety to the face he loved. But the outward repression of his full heart only served to made the yearning beauty of his face doubly striking, the more, as its earthly vigor and promise of life seemed slowly stealing away.

As they watched the ocean together, their conversation often turned on thoughts of life and death—for what, more than this great far-distant meeting of sky and sea, suggests them both.

There had been a heavy storm of wind and rain. Husband and wife were on the beach as usual, seated on rush mats and heavy blankets, and sheltered by the great white hills of sand.

The rain had long since ceased, the wind had died away, and the sun shone in all its steady glory on the glistening, reflecting beach, and shot fitfully through the cloud of spray thrown up by the breaking crests of the billows. The waves still buffeted the sullen beach, and the tremendous sea, from boundary to boundary, boomed hollow defiance to the elements.

"Leon," said Timosa—breaking a long silence between them—"when I sit like this, watching the sea, I feel that I am within the ravaging maw of some terrible marine monster. There, far in front of us, where the sky and sea meet, is the great axial line from which the massive jaws swing voraciously wide open, the converging earth and sky rimmed by the angry clouds, and these serrated hills of sand are the monster's gleaming teeth, and the great rolling hungry sea is his ravenous, lolling tongue," and she shuddered with the gruesome vividness of her own mental picture.

"Oh, how cruel a fancy!" replied her husband, looking at her in wonder. "Nature is often what we individually make her, nevertheless nature is always God's, and God is good. Shall I tell you how this grand picture speaks to me?"

"The great circling horizon of sea and sky is God's strong right arm binding the elements to their proper sphere; the sky is His ever-changing, ever-beautiful canopy of love and protection; the earth is the budding, blooming, fruiting home prepared for His children; both earth and sky meeting in the mystic circle of that strong right arm; the dark clouds and these serrated hills of sand are His kindly screens to protect us from the too-great brightness of the sun that smiles us undying hope and good cheer; the tossing, rolling sea is God's purifier and regenerator, swallowing up all

manner of uncleanness and breathing out of its renovating lungs the health-giving, odorous breezes of the ocean."

As he spoke, his face seemed bathed in a glow of mysterious inspiration, and a strange, unearthly light rested on his pale, uncovered, brow and beamed from his eyes, absorbed in the far-off vision he had conjured from the depths of his untainted soul.

Timosa was awed by his words and looks. For the first time she regarded her husband with seeing eyes. She had been entirely engrossed in her past sad and bitter memories; she had been benumbed by the weight of her own hidden life tragedy, which she had bound herself never to disclose by marrying this man with the secret unconfessed; she had been almost unconsciously regardless of how her coldness might affect him, so long as she could master herself in his presence and serve outwardly the husband her father had imposed upon her. She had never so severely blamed herself, though at times the wickedness of it all had rushed blindly over her. On the whole, she regarded it as one of the inevitables she had always received submissively from her father's hand. She knew that the man she had married was good and noble, and had chosen her for the love he bore her; but that was not her father's fault, much less her own. Her father had chosen him for his money and position; she had passively accepted him because she dared not refuse to obey. It was only incidental that he was patient, noble, and kind. She accepted his caresses because she could forget him while in his very arms, and think mournfully of her dead husband. She found that it grew easier every day to keep her thoughts in her own breast, and was glad in a dull, thankless way, never asking herself why or how it had been made easy.

Now, she looked at her husband and was awed. More than that, she noted what she had been curiously blind to before, the extreme pallor of his cheek, intensified by the hectic flush that burned there, the prominence of the blue veins, and the brilliancy of the dark, deep-brown eyes.

She placed her hand upon his arm and spoke to him softly. Once—twice she called his name before the rapt expression faded from his face and he turned his luminous eyes upon her.

Once that light touch upon his arm would have been instantly acknowledged by a tender caress. Strangely enough she thought of this with a quick feeling of pain when he looked down at her and, still half-absorbed, said dreamily, "Well, Timosa?"

"Leon, do you feel that God is very near you? Do you believe in special providences, and that God really knows and cares about the thoughts and acts of everyday life?" she asked softly.

"Surely, dear," he answered. "I believe that God permeates every atom of His creation, and that every good thought in our hearts is a part of Himself. His presence there is a special providence in itself—all I can ask. If He is willing to stay with me through everything, surely I am willing to let Him lead me where He sees best, and shall not ask Him to change any of His great laws and ordinances in order that the soul in which He Himself dwells may be led through pleasant paths. Believing all this, it is hardly necessary for me to say that I feel sure He does know and care about our everyday thoughts and deeds."

Timosa looked at him wonderingly. "I did not know that you thought so much about God, Leon. Why are you so different from other men? And you have had

everything to make you selfish—money, position, flattery—everything.”

“Everything but health, Timosa,” he answered, a little sadly. “I never had that—and I never shall have, I think, dear.”

She looked at him wistfully and longed to lean against his breast, or even to take his hand, but, for the first time, a sense of her deceit and her utter unworthiness restrained her—she felt the great distance between herself and this pure soul who would have scorned to act a lie. So she only said with a curious tremble in her voice, “I hope, Leon, that God will not always deny you health. You have beautiful thoughts. How does it come that you are not a Catholic? I thought all the Spaniards who came to St. Augustine were strong Catholics.”

So they were, dear, and I am a Catholic in the broadest sense of the term. I love God, and God revealed—Jesus Christ. My love is neither more nor less in any stated Church. All that I ask is to be able to keep my heart free from any secret sin.”

She started painfully and looked away from him, but his eyes did not follow her—they were drinking in the beauty of the afternoon sky, which was slowly changing its pale gray-blue tinge to the waving, pearly rose-hues of a giant sea-shell.

Timosa rose hurriedly, saying, “Come, the air is growing damp and chilly. You must not sit here longer!”

Together they walked home over the long bridge, and Timosa noted with alarm how short and labored were his breaths, as he made his way in the face of the breeze that had unexpectedly started up.

Her alarm was not without cause. The hacking cough

was more pronounced after that afternoon on the beach, and her husband complained that the weather was growing warmer and affected him with a strange languor. They made hasty preparations to go North then, and after the fatigue of the trip was over, De Monteano seemed quite himself. So they settled down in a quiet little village near the Hudson, for the summer.

While in this retreat, Timosa received a letter from one of her childhood friends. It contained a sad story of sin and suffering. The writer had cut herself off from all family ties by her willfulness, and was now the unhappy mother of a worse than fatherless child but a few weeks old. She herself was in the last stages of a lingering disease, and now implored her old friend in God's name to take this child into her protective care. The letter was written in the very agony of remorse, and almost in the last breath of the sin-stricken mother.

Timosa's heart was a hot-bed of emotions over this letter. The strange memories of her secret past—the past that had given her a mother's heart—pleaded loudly in behalf of this desolate woman and her desolate child.

She almost feared to go to her husband with this strange request—her wronged husband, whose love and believing tenderness she had so insulted by her marriage vows.

But at last she gathered up courage to open the subject, and plead eloquently, almost breathlessly, for the innocent child who would soon be left so helpless to the mercy of cold-hearted strangers.

De Monteano heard her through and then, with a thoughtful smile she did not quite comprehend, said kindly, "With all my heart, dear, if it is your wish. You may need each other."

CHAPTER X.

So the baby came. A tiny, little, round-faced, velvet-cheeked morsel of a girl.

She was just two months old when the young couple received her from the messenger's arms.

In the pitiful little note which came with her, the dying mother had written her name "Winona," adding sadly, "I longed to call her something, Timosa, so I named her Winona. It is so softly musical and I thought it might be all the music she would ever have in her poor little life. God teach you to love her, my more than friend. Had I a heart left to break, it would now break to part with her. A little while longer and I shall be at rest."

The touching appeal melted Timosa's heart to deepest tenderness. She took the unconscious baby in her arms with something of a mother's chastened joy.

To De Monteano also the child brought a wonderful measure of comfort. He loved to cuddle the soft, warm, palpitating little creature against his breast, holding her there in her dewy sleep, and drinking deep of the dependent love which he so hungered for, and had learned so sadly not to ask. For he was all unconscious of the new influences and emotions silently working in his wife's heart.

Those few hours on the beach, and their vivid self-revelation, Timosa had never forgotten. It was the specter of her own sin-laden soul that now stood between her husband

and herself. She dared not open her heart to him—each day they lived together seemed to increase the impossibility of such a confession—and the caresses to which she had once been indifferent, she longed for now with all the craving of her self-convicted heart. But so awakened and sensitive had grown her careless conscience, under the example and influence of the pure-souled husband she had dared to “tolerate,” that she shrank from the very caress she longed for. So he strove more sadly and patiently than ever to repress his love and his longing.

Thus the two drifted ever apart and yet ever nearer. But the slow waste of consumption had been silently doing its work, and at last the hour came when it showed itself in all its hideousness.

The summer had passed, and it was early in November. The winds blew keen and cold, and the young couple were just on the eve of a return South, when the frail barriers gave way and De Monteano was prostrated with a frightful hemorrhage. Timosa was distraught with an anguish she could not herself define. Surely she did not love this man—her heart was, and ever should be, with her dead husband, with him whom she had chosen for herself in those earliest days of dawning womanhood, and for whom she had suffered so much. De Monteano had commanded her respect, had awakened her conscience, had shamed her duplicity, selfishness, and cowardice; he was indeed her Faith, Hope, and Charity; but her *love* she believed buried in the grave of the husband whom, coward-like, she had allowed herself to deny to the world—and to this man who had married her with never a thought of such a life-tragedy between them.

Her agitation, her pain, her grief, were intense—she knew not why. De Monteano’s brown eyes looked out of his

pallid face with half-glad, half-sorrowful wonder. Yet she scarcely dared to touch him, unless in some ministration to his physical comfort. She dared not rest his head against her unshrived heart.

At last the invalid rallied and they set out upon their delayed trip, this time carrying with them the now motherless child they had taken into their hearts and home.

The journey was made without particular incident, except that the soft southern air seemed to breathe a new vigor into De Monteano's weakened frame. The improvement, however, was but transient, and as soon as they were once more settled in their home, Timosa begged to call a physician who should be a daily attendant upon the invalid.

By this time, Adam Links had become firmly established in St. Augustine. His reputation was enviable and secure, and his practice lucrative. The inmates of the re-opened villa knew him well by reputation, but had never yet required his professional services. Now, as the most skilled physician available, he was called upon, and at once responded to the summons.

He was shown to the drawing-room. Timosa wished to meet him first and explain something of the changing phases of the disease with which he was to cope.

He stood there motionless, waiting in soldier-like attitude. Presently, Timosa drew aside the portière and advanced to greet him. One glance at his peculiar features and she dropped her outstretched hand, fell back a pace or two, and stood staring at him with affrighted eyes. He opened his lips to speak, when suddenly a wave of recognition swept over his mind and he too remained dumb—rooted to the spot. Each saw the ghastly specters of the past slowly rising between them.

A hundred thoughts flashed through their minds with the rapidity of lightning. Thoughts saying to her—

“Will he remember me? How much does he know of my secret? What explanation can I make to him? How could I dismiss him without explanation? What excuse could I offer my husband? Will he disclose my past?”

And to him—

“What does she know of the fate of the child? What accusation will she bring against me? What does this man, her husband, know of her early life?”

Out of these conflicting questions and emotions the doctor managed to open his stiff lips and voice the professional inquiry, “How can I serve you, madam?”

Timosa was still too shaken to speak, and instinctively she turned to the window and drew lower the half-raised shade.

The instant of diverted attention strengthened the doctor's trained nerves, and he was rigidly calm again as she turned to make reply.

“I have called you to attend my husband,” she said coldly, in a voice she strove in vain to steady, while unconsciously the words “my husband,” fell from her lips with a slight accent of defiance. “He is expecting you.”

Lifting the portière to let him pass, she pointed to the door of the invalid's study saying, “You will find him there.”

Adam passed out without suffering his eyes to meet hers again. He was alone with her husband!

Timosa sank into a chair—cold with an agony of suspense. She could not have talked with him about the case—she was utterly unable to bear alone the torture of his presence, suggesting as it did a host of unanswerable questions. Yet she dared not enter her husband's room while

he was there—what hidden past might he not disclose in his conversation? She must never allow him to come to the house again—but how prevent it, if her husband were satisfied, without arousing suspicion—and whom should she call in his place?

Timosa was not fertile in plans and schemes for covering up the tracks of evil-doing. She was not a keen, cunning, unscrupulous sinner, she was but the weak victim of circumstances, cowardice, and a sorrow-deadened conscience.

She turned the problem over and over in her bewildered brain and waited in pitiful apprehension for the physician's departure.

At last he was gone. Timosa rose, half-dazed, from her chair, and composing herself with a mighty effort repaired to her husband's side.

In spite of her struggle for personal command, he noticed her agitation and said kindly, "You must not worry about me so, Timosa."—Oh, how her heart smote her for her duplicity!

She swallowed the words of self-reproach that sprang half-way to her lips, and forced herself to ask naturally, "How do you like Dr. Links, Leon?"

"I am well satisfied with him, Timosa. There is something very odd about him and he is a trifle brusque, but I believe he is a thoroughly honest fellow, and would speak the exact truth to a patient. I can respect any man who speaks the truth, and want no one around me who lies even with an idea to my own comfort. I have told him to come every day, and we shall get along very well, I am sure."

Timosa turned cold with a nameless dread and murmured some half-intelligible response, shrinking from her husband's eyes so full of the reproach of their unsuspicious love.

The day dragged by and she had thought of no way out of her dilemma. She believed that Dr. Links had been in full collusion with her father, and feared him in the same helpless, unreasoning way she had always feared that stern parent.

She had a morbid terror that whatever step she might take in the matter, he would still find a way of coercing her, for, knowing nothing of his early veneration for her, and nothing of the strange scene that had taken place in the old garret, she believed him thoroughly wicked and vindictive.

When she had come to herself after that terrible night where, in the darkest hour of her life, she felt herself helpless in the hands of enemies, she asked for her child. Her father had replied that the child was dead-born and a monstrosity. They deemed it best not to let her see it. She had turned her face to the wall and wept scalding tears, but had not even dared to question the truth of his words.

Little did she know of the pitying compassion for her that had surged in the heart of the man she now feared with an almost abject terror. Little did she dream of all the mental suffering he had undergone on her behalf, of the unhappy sinister influence the outcome of that night's work had wielded on his subsequent life.

Dr. Links went home to wrestle anew with his lurking devils. There was nothing for him to do but continue his professional calls till some sign of future action should be given—then he must defend himself as best he might. How he longed to know just what was in the mind of Burbank's daughter, just how much she knew of the transactions of that fateful night. He tried to frame some method of drawing the information from her—but could think of not one question he dared to ask. The sight of her face had stirred

deeply his old feeling of sympathy and veneration. Alas! he could never explain to her the real motives of his heart or disclose to her the real tragedy which he supposed had taken place—it was far too horrible, too ghastly. He recalled the look of fear and horror on her face, and hated himself that he must always remain the object of her loathing.

Presently he laughed to himself, in the privacy of his den, one of the long, bitter, reckless laughs which were his uncanny self-indulgence. He apostrophized his evil spirit with a gloomy recklessness lurking in his sinister eye. "Bravo, old boy, how well you do your business, how gayly we go to the devil, you and I! You're a master hand at looking after details—everything turns up at the right moment for you! ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

So these three suffered on with this one secret, planned by an iron-willed, unscrupulous father, for the lofty aspiration of subduing his timid, helpless daughter to his unbending sway.

Timosa suffered daily the agonizing suspense engendered by the doctor's visits. Even baby Winona could not divert her thoughts, and she became worn, haggard, and pale. The doctor grew harder and more callous—the one good influence in his life had turned to bitterest gall, while De Monteano suffered more and more in silence. He knew that his life was fast drawing to a close, yet never had his wife, with all her solicitude and her unflinching ministrations, seemed so far, far from him and all his yearning love.

At last the end came.

The weather being very warm and pleasant, the invalid had deserted the house for the wide Turkish couch under the portico. He had thrown himself down among the Oriental

pillows in utter weariness and languor. The couch faced the stone stairway leading to the floor above, and through the Gothic window at the head of the first landing, poured the afternoon sun, sending down long shafts of pure white light to flicker and play upon the tiled floor at his feet. The soft air just fanned his cheek with the lightest and gentlest of touches. The never-ceasing fountain played its tireless music in sweet plaintive monotone. By and by the invalid's eyes grew heavy, the green leaves and scarlet blossoms of the hanging trumpet-vine blurred upon his vision, the waving sunlight on the floor narrowed to a faint quivering line of purest gold, and the tawny colors of the Turkish rugs upon the floor blended into one. He slept.

Presently, from the loggia overhead, Timosa's soft footsteps came lightly down. She stopped upon the landing as she caught sight of her husband's reposeful attitude, fearing to disturb his slumbers.

Standing there a moment in silent contemplation, the whole pathos of their lives together swept over her like a flood. The utter abandon of his sleep in the full light of day revealed to the last sad line the ravages of disease upon him. The closed eyes lay deeply shadowed beneath the dark brows, and the white cheeks looked drawn and sunken in their tranquillity; the book of poems he still held had closed over the slender white fingers, but the blue veins on the back of the hand were cruelly visible.

Timosa stood there like one in an evil dream, gazing down upon the unconscious sleeper.

The suppressed emotions of months flowed unrebuked into her expressive face. Her heart was filled to bursting with unavailing sorrow and her lips gave unbidden utterance to a low moan of grief, remorse, and despair.

At the sound, the sleeper opened startled eyes. He saw Timosa standing there in the broken shaft of light, bending her heart-hungry, soul-sad eyes upon him; her soft clinging white gown, made whiter still by the sun's effulgence. At the vision, a radiant smile lighted his wan features, and he murmured wonderingly, "Timosa, I was dreaming of you!"

With a sobbing cry she sprang down the intervening steps and threw herself upon her knees beside his couch. He tried to raise her, to lift himself upon his pillows, but she gently pushed him back. She hid his wasted hands in her bosom and bathed them with her tears. She kissed passionately his brow, his hair, his lips, his hands, the while sobbing piteously, unrepressed, as though the fountains once overflowed could never again be restrained. Then she drew his head to her breast and held it there with the infinite brooding tenderness of a mother. She laid her soft bare arm about his face as if to frame it in an ivory beauty whiter than its own, and between her shaking sobs, the tenderest, most endearing love-words fell quivering from her lips.

De Monteano was too overcome by his emotions to utter a word and yielded passively to her caresses, like one lost and wondering in an entrancing dream. Only his eyes spoke for him, and they poured forth such a glory of tender response that Timosa sobbed anew and kissed them closed.

The joy of this surrender to her love was cruelly short, and when her painful agitation had somewhat subsided she laid the head she had pillowed upon her breast back upon upon the cushion and said with broken pathos, "Leon, I have poured out all my love—for the first and last time."

He lifted his eyes to her face with a long glance of painful apprehension and dismay.

"Darling, you have not brought all this happiness into my heart, to turn coldly away from me once more?" he asked mournfully.

"Leon! Leon!" she entreated, "do not ask me for a love which I have given too late—too late. I will break away from my cowardice to-night, though I put my heel upon my own heart. Help me! help me!—to tell you."

A foreboding anguish showed itself in the pale face, but he reached out his hand and took hers within its clasp, saying solemnly, "Timosa, I'll hold your little hand through anything—now that I know—I may."

Timosa bent and passionately kissed the fingers covering her own and broke resolutely into the painful story. On, on, from first to last she hurried, sparing no detail of her love, her secret marriage, the death of her husband, the birth of the child, the forced marriage which made her for the second time a wife, the cowardice, the selfish indifference, the awakened conscience, the agony of Dr. Links's presence, the stifled, repentant love. Through it all she hastened feverishly, and still the weak hand-clasp held her own, though the palm grew clammy and the fingers trembled violently.

She ended it all with a hard, tearless sob, unavailing despair written upon every line of her downcast face.

There was a long pause. The invalid's labored breathing smote upon her ear like the knell of death. The seconds seemed like hours. She expected nothing. She only thought of one thing, that when that hand unclasped hers, when she left his side now, it would be never to return with a wife's great privilege of love and ministration.

She forced herself to look at him. His glance was turned

away, but the great beads of cold perspiration stood out upon his forehead. Her heart gave an overpowering throb of passionate grief. She would have died to wipe them away with the warm pressure of her cheeks, but she dared not stir.

As she still gazed at him, he turned his head slowly toward her, and with dull eyes, from which all life seemed to have been stricken, he looked into her own. His quivering lip moved as if he would speak, and, as she bent anxiously to catch the whisper, he loosened her hand from his grasp and slipping his arm about her waist, drew her slowly to him.

With unbelieving wonder she crept closer to his side and at last, unforbidden, buried her shamed head in his breast. Her tears had spent themselves, but as he passed his hand gently over her hair her kneeling figure shook with deep, dry sobs.

"Dear child, if you only had been honest with me from the first," he said, at last, brokenly. "It is hard to forgive all these cruel months in which we have both suffered so much. Still, Timosa, I have taken care of you. I have saved you from your father's harshness. I have—loved you. There is something for me in that—something that I can never wish out of my life. I can bear everything better now, Timosa—now that you have told me. Sometimes I have wondered why I must be stricken down just in the early dawn of human possibilities, why I must give up all hopes and aspirations of a long and useful career. Now it is all explained, little one; it is to free you from the consequences of your blind mistake."

"O Leon, Leon, Leon!" she wailed with a bitter cry. "God help me! I cannot bear it!"

"How came you to tell me to-night, Timosa, after all these long months of silence?" he asked gently.

She raised her head and looked at him with blurred eyes, saying solemnly, "Leon, the accusing agony of my love was too cruel. I must have told you, if the telling meant my death. I should have told you for the unrestricted privilege of holding your head for one moment against my heart before I revealed my perfidy. I have longed—O how bitterly!—these last months, to tear away this barrier of guilt between us, but the thought of losing forever the love I had so late learned to return"—and her voice died in her throat.

In the pain of hearing the long confession of her former life, De Monteano seemed to have forgotten the first passionate declaration of love for himself, and a glad, tremulous smile broke over his face as he comprehended her words.

"Did you say your love for me, Timosa—your love for me held the secret unconfessed?"—he said, dreamily—"then what more have I to ask for these few remaining days of my life? What more than to drink the last sweet drops in my cup of life, regardless of what went before? Come closer to me my wife—my wife. You are like a new gift of Heaven—you and your new love."

Two hearts were tearfully, solemnly happy in the hour that followed. So happy that they could look into the future with prophetic visions, that they could see the rainbow span of their chastened, spiritualized love reaching far over the dark river into the mystic eternities where all sorrows blossom into joy.

The long, pregnant silence was at last broken by De Monteano's voice asking musingly—

"Have you thought what day it is, sweetheart?"

Timosa looked out thoughtfully upon the court, and something in the twilight scene recalled gradually another scene from the depths of her memory.

"O Leon," she exclaimed, "it is the anniversary of our home-coming! What a different hour! Thank God, what a different hour!" and she folded her arms about his neck with tearful tenderness.

After this Dr. Links was courteously dismissed. No explanation was made and none asked. He knew that some revelations had been made but of what they were, he was utterly and tormentingly ignorant.

* * * * *

Among the few visitors that were received at the villa was one, a Presbyterian minister, who, with his young wife, had come to St. Augustine about the time De Monteano and his wife had made their first trip South together.

They, also, were from New York City, and the two families soon formed relations of intimacy.

Silas Stillwater, the young divine, had been called to a small Presbyterian charge located on P—— Street. The church was new and the congregation, laboriously collected after the decimation of the war, was small and poor of funds. But the young clergyman brought the freshness as well as the verdancy of youth to his work. He also brought an overweening idea of his own individual abilities and powers, coupled with a most profound faith in the peculiar personal sanctity of his office. A faith so wide and full that it had served to salve his conscience of the wounds a fast youth had inflicted, and close his bowels of compassion against any who, indulging in similar modes of living, failed to adopt his unrestricted absolution.

Mrs. Stillwater was the type of woman that young min-

isters are particularly prone to choose, in other words, as unfitted by nature and education to assist her husband in his peculiar vocation as it was possible to find.

It may be that having seen too much of the heated side of life, Silas Stillwater had provided a pious and penitential cold douche for his conscience, with a view to inuring it to hardships. At any rate, he had married a veritable iceberg. Now icebergs have a glittering scintillating beauty all their own, and this woman, like them, was frigidly beautiful.

She was tall and slender, with long lifeless arms and cold white hands, her small, compact head surmounted with correct precision, the long pale column of her throat. Her ash-colored hair lay smooth above the neat curves of her extremely small ears. Her features were clear-cut and regular, untinted save for the faint pinkness of her thin lips. Her eyes were small and of the palest blue, while her slightly curved brows, like her hair, were nearly colorless. She moved through the world with the coldness of a pallid moon over a wintry landscape. But at times the piercing, steely glint that shot from her pale blue eyes threatened to strike fire from the very stones about her.

The only thing that Mr. Stillwater duly revered (beside himself and his clerical office) was his wife. He touched her with something of apologetic awe—as one touches the cold saber over his mantel. Apparently, having adopted her for his penance, he indulged in no other, preferring, as many men do, to take their penance in special forms and at stated intervals, doing as they please between times.

Mrs. Stillwater, it must be confessed, was a typical minister's wife in one respect. She was extremely religious. (As though that were not the all-important requirement!)

She was a model lay figure for the prevailing religious fashion—which is quite as transitory and exacting as other fashions—in fact she was an example (lest I do her an injustice) in all matters excepting those of the heart—which, poor lady, was all that could be asked of her, considering that she had no heart to give her intuition.

No flowers or furbelows adorned the person of the young minister's wife. She usually dressed in pale gray, something on the tone of her hair; her only ornament was a brooch consisting of a large, milky-hued stone, set round with a fine filagree of gold, fashioned into the airy forms of snow-flakes.

One would wonder what bond of sympathy could have existed between the two families—one of the villa, and one of the Presbyterian parsonage—unless indeed it was the attraction of extremely opposite natures. Certain it is, however, that such a bond did exist, and that the Stillwaters were frequent visitors at the home of the De Monteanos.

Timosa, missing all of her old friends during this sojourn South, was glad of some one whose companionships and interests had been so nearly identical to her own, while De Monteano, with his peculiarly charitable and religious temperament, had a large fund of liking and respect for any man whom he believed had consecrated himself to the betterment of humanity.

The Stillwaters had not returned North during the hot summer months, deciding, with great foresight, that the devil would be particularly busy during the reign of his own peculiar temperature. They made haste, therefore, to pay a visit of welcome at the villa immediately on the return of their friends.

They were quite astonished to find that the family now

numbered three. Timosa presented the beautiful baby Winona with great pride, while Mr. Stillwater explained with an air of importance that they also possessed a wee daughter of their very own.

While in the midst of relating this quite unparalleled bit of news, Dominie Stillwater kept puzzled eyes upon baby Winona's face, saying reflectively, "That baby looks just like some one I know, I can't for the life of me tell who."

Timosa flushed a little. She was already becoming sensitive on the subject of the baby's parentage, and meant to shield her as much as possible from all slandering, ungenerous tongues.

"The baby is an orphan child of a friend of mine," she said quietly. "She was a sweet girl. We shall bring the little one up quite as our own. She need never know that she bears our name only by adoption. You will be the only ones let into our secret. I know we can trust you with it."

But the clergyman did not seem so much interested in the child's story and future prospects as he did in the study of her face. His meditative gaze was still riveted upon her as he rejoined musingly, "She is certainly very like some one I have seen. Her eyes look strangely familiar." Then an expression of sudden enlightenment swept over his face which he hastily controlled, but not until a dull red glow flamed unexpectedly over his countenance.

The subject of the baby's parentage seemed to pall upon him then, and he quickly reverted to his favorite theme of how successful he had been in thwarting the machinations of the evil one during the months of their absence.

Timosa warmly congratulated Mrs. Stillwater upon her new pleasures and duties as a mother. That good lady seemed a little embarrassed, as though she knew that some-

thing unusual was expected of her. But the only extempore response that seemed able to escape from her chilled bosom was the somewhat prosaic remark that "the child seemed healthy."

Soon after, the visitors rose to depart. As Mr. Stillwater bade his adieus, he gave a furtive, half-anxious glance at the sleeping face of the baby, now lying softly at rest against De Monteano's breast.

CHAPTER XI.

If only life would read like a story book, how gladly we should further follow these two hearts, from which all misunderstandings have been swept away.

But God writes the history of our lives in His own far-seeing way—and “His ways are not our ways.”

When the clouds are torn asunder and we gaze with eyes no longer holden into the Great Invisible, then shall we see the grains of gold lying all unheeded along the rough path over which we trod with bruised feet and aching hearts—the path ending at last at the gate of the City Beautiful.

De Monteano's health now failed rapidly. Timosa watched by his side with unflinching tenderness, with unflagging devotion. Somehow, in spite of the dark cloud that hung over them, these two had never been so strangely happy before.

De Monteano's wonderful faith and almost prophetic vision of things spiritual, now that her heart was free from guilt, had completely regenerated Timosa's life. They sat for hours together with clasped hands, talking over the mysterious nearness of the Celestial City and the friends gone before, and there was no earthly jealousy in the tenderness of the invalid's voice, as he spoke to his wife of the soul which had been so dear to her own now waiting to welcome him as a brother-lover on the other shore. With all her new insight into unrevealed things, Timosa almost trembled in the presence of this great love so passing true and tender yet seeking not its own.

The watching and anxiety of her husband's illness was beginning to tell on her own health. The quick eye of the invalid did not fail to perceive this fact, and he often gently urged her to take proper rest and recreation.

For a week he had been failing more rapidly than usual and Timosa had scarcely left his side. But one morning, after a fair night's rest, he awoke feeling much easier. Almost the first words from his lips voiced a playful command to his wife that she should start out and have a sail on the river.

She knew that to comply with his request would greatly ease his mind, then too, she realized that she must husband her strength or break down and let some one else take the place she so jealously appropriated to herself. So about ten o'clock in the morning she came downstairs prepared for a two hours' sail on the Matanzas.

Her husband was in his favorite place on the couch in the portico. She had kissed him good-bye, assuring him that she would not be long gone, and had almost passed out of sight, when the invalid called after her wistfully: "Come back just one minute, *enamorada*, I can hardly let you go yet. How sweet and fresh you look in your pretty boating gown!"

She quickly returned, chiding him with playful tenderness for his sweet folly, arranged and patted his cushions into their most alluring comfort, and then, folding her arms about him, pressed a long kiss upon his lips, saying, half tearfully, "And now may I go, foolish one?"

"If you can get away from me," he answered fondly, playfully holding to the skirt of her gown, and following her with adoring eyes.

In a moment she would have passed out of the gate, but

she turned and threw him a kiss, blowing it lightly to him from the tips of her fingers, while he called faintly after her, "Take care of yourself, darling, I think the wind has risen."

Timosa hurried to the dock, heedless of the solicitous warning. The boat she selected was one they had used many times together and the old colored sailor one she implicitly trusted.

Those who know the Matanzas river only in its summer moods, know it but imperfectly indeed. There are weeks when through all its silver length it hands protectingly the flat coast from the encroachment of the sea, but sometimes the salt breeze blowing gently across Anastasia Island sweeps into a fierce gale, the ocean, barred by its sandy beaches, pours an impetuous stream through its channels, and the calm river suddenly feels the throbbing life of the parent sea. Its glistening surface is rudely broken, white spray dashes from the crests of the wind-driven waves, and the rifts upon the sandy beach hurry daringly into forbidden places.

In such a treacherous moment the little sailing boat trusted itself to the stream. For a time it skirted safely the coast of North Beach, but while it still lay, like a fluttering white, bird far up the river, a watcher on the shore might have felt the growing stiffness of the wind beating upon his face, and noted with alarm the threatening aspect of the sky and the complaining undertone of the disturbed waters. But the little boat seemed not to heed. Those who might have been spectators, watching with the eye, not the heart, felt wonder rather than alarm.—a wonder turned to startled sympathy when, a few hours later, the news spread that an overturned boat had been found floating on the Matanzas. When the party of rescuers, who had hastily put out to her aid, neared the disabled craft they found a poor old negro, half

exhausted, clinging to it with one hand and supporting the lifeless body of his passenger with the other.

The fishermen rowed swiftly to shore with their added burden, hoping against hope that life might not be quite extinct in the still form. "Who knows but Dr. Links can bring her to life," they suggested encouragingly to each other.

Adam received the inanimate body in silence. If the sudden stiffening of his features and whitening of his lips were noticed by the rough sailors who bore her in, they did not at least comprehend the strange sickening of the senses that thus revealed itself. He thought bitterly of the incongruity of it all, that she should be brought to him, while he worked over her till the perspiration poured in great drops from his face.

At first the sailors lingered, officious in their suggestions, forward in their efforts of assistance, but when the doctor's tireless efforts brought no warmth to the chilled body, no color to the stricken lips, they slipped out one by one, moved by the innate sense of fitness which death brings even to the uncouth.

Adam was left alone with the dead. There was no possible reason for hope, no more need for work. He composed the pale form and stood looking down upon the upturned face. In this still presence the facts of his life arrayed themselves vividly before him and passed in mute procession through his mind. He tried to shake off the fascination that held him there, but the spell would not be broken. As he gazed down upon her face, the cold gloom beneath his sullen brows slowly faded, reproach and sorrow battled for its place, his lips twitched and his chest rose and fell with the spasmodic action of stifled emotion. He had worked over her

with all the physician's abandon,—fighting for life; now the pallid form was once more sacred to the spirit that had shrunk from him in fear. Struggling with himself to overcome an emotion so long unknown to his life and thought, he put out his hand to touch her and thus bid defiance to the sentiment that bade him refrain, but with a sudden movement he drew it back and, as if action had overcome his self-control, muttered chokingly. “You hated me!—you feared me!—you never knew!—and you were my only bit——” Then with a harsh gesture of disdain for his weakness he whirled about, threw back his head and tried to laugh—that gruesome, uncanny laugh that was like a curse of defiance,—but an invisible hand clutched at his throat and the sound was a rush of shuddering sobs that tore their way like escaped prisoners from his panting breast.

Silas Stillwater, his friend, was sent to tell the bereaved husband of his loss. He went home to his wife saying it was wonderful how calmly De Monteano received the news. He had sometimes wondered if there were not a little something wrong up at the big house.

As for the invalid, he went feebly in where they had laid her, and, closing the door gently behind him, moved softly to her side. He did not sob or moan but the tears flowed down his face as he gently touched her forehead and looked up, saying brokenly, “Timosa, Timosa, my wife, that kiss will last me till I come—till—I—come!”

And so De Monteano parted from his dead.

He had one earthly interest left, one unfulfilled trust,—the baby Winona. He gathered up his last energy and strength to make provision for her.

His own people were in Spain for a long sojourn, time would not be permitted him to tell them of the little one he had adopted and learn if they would be its future guardians. Timosa's father was not to be thought of. He was glad now that they had never told any of Timosa's relatives about the child,—that Burbank might, in any way, lay claim to her.

But what should he do! His friend, Silas Stillwater, was beside him. De Monteano's anxious face cleared. He laid his thin hand on the minister's arm,—“Silas, my good friend, will you take the trust?”

“Gladly!” was the reply,—and thus it was settled.

De Monteano called in a lawyer. The bulk of his property, by provision of a former will, reverted to his family, but he was able to settle a considerable income upon his adopted daughter for life, also to add a generous recompense to Stillwater for his guardianship.

De Monteano in his few allotted days could do no better—and he trusted his friend.

For a little while yet he lingered. The baby Winona was scarcely ever out of his sight. Then he, too, slept with a strange smile of wondrous joy lingering upon his lips.

CHAPTER XII.

So a home had been found for baby Winona—a home, a shelter—but a home in no loving heart.

As we have said before, Mrs. Stillwater had no heart to give, and the Rev. Stillwater had frittered the most of his away early in life. What part still remained his to command, he had no doubt bestowed upon his own wife and child, leasing a little, on interest, to the converted members of his congregation.

Mrs. Stillwater had excellent ideas on the bringing up of children. For one thing, she believed that most of the ills of babyhood come from over-feeding. It was her theory that the world, as a whole, is over-indulged, children in particular. Those under her charge should be examples of that median state which ought to be the condition of every mortal in his dangerous position between heaven and hell, God and the devil.

She began by feeding judiciously. Too much animal food creates too much animal heat, too much animal heat creates too much life and spirit, too much exhilaration, intensity, emotion, and ambition. All these phantasms of the mind lead down as well as up, therefore better to keep on the level plane, though it be an arid desert, a dreary waste as far as eye can see or imagination stretch.

But to return. She fed the two children by an exact rule of her own. Belle, her child, being a little younger than

Winona, had slightly the advantage, and continued to be well fed. Both bottles were filled religiously with the same quantity, and at the same time.

It would have required nothing less than the voice of an angel to persuade Mrs. Stillwater to add a trifle to either bottle after she had made up her mind what the proper quantity should be. Winona became accustomed to the new régime and the diminished quantities after a few days of slight fretting and, being a baby, never realized the change in her care from the ministrations of loving tenderness to the duteous exactions of conscience. Or, if she did realize it, no one might ever know—not even she herself.

O, the wisdom of a Providence that hides the miseries of helpless babyhood even from the comprehension of its own soul, that leaves the memory a blank, while the tongue is dumb to express its wants, or utter its protests!

The babies grew up together, without particular incident in their young lives, until they were four years old.

The Stillwater family had managed to remain South through all the hot weather of the summers they had passed there, but excessive heat always made Winona languid, and this summer she fell seriously ill with gastritis.

Her guardians, becoming alarmed, finally called in Dr. Links.

Adam knew that the De Monteanos had left a child—for he, and all others except the Stillwaters, supposed it to be their own—but he had never seen it or heard anything of it, except that it had been left under the guardianship of Silas Stillwater.

As he entered the room in response to their summons and gazed at the pale little face on the pillow, a big lump swelled in his throat.

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All the old memories rushed over his heart. He was a lonely man. He had walled himself in from every intimate association. He had no friend who loved him. There was not a woman in his house. His patients praised his skill, respected his faithfulness—and were glad when he was gone.

He looked at the child and thought of Timosa. He saw no likeness to the mother in its sweet face, but he thought how it had nestled in her breast and cooed upon her lap. He looked over at Mrs. Stillwater, standing cold and stately, in the window, and shivered, man though he was. The vision of Timosa's face, as he last saw it, came back to him,—the face from which all light had been stricken save the light of the glory beyond,—and the old bitter thought, "She can never know, she can never know," crept heavily through his mind.

He leaned over the little sufferer and laid his fingers gently on the clammy forehead, then on the flaccid wrist.

Some mysterious tenderness in that gentle touch went straight to the starved little heart, and Winona opened her deep shadowed eyes and looked into his face, then wound her weak baby fingers about one of his and gave a pitiful little cry of distress and pain. Then the sunken eyes closed again and the blue shadows deepened, but the slender fingers still clung to his, with an appealing weakness in their frail clasp.

Adam felt somehow stifled. He had his old hysterical impulse to laugh, and dragged at his collar for more air. A ray of sunshine had fallen into the dungeon of his heart. He had been living among ghosts, and trembled at the presence of an angel. It was a mistake! In a moment it would be gone!—this light, this quivering tenderness that made his heart sob in painful ecstasy!

The little fingers still kept their clinging hold. He felt a trembling thrill stealing up his arm,—

“Well,” said Mrs. Stillwater’s cold voice.—The child gave a quick start and the little hand flew open!

Adam breathed again. His professional voice came back to him. But how softened, how subdued!

“Madam, this child is very sick. Nothing will save her but the most untiring care. Not a loud word must be spoken in her presence—she started at your voice. Not a heavy footfall must carelessly cross this room. She must not be moved,—or even bathed. Her food must be given her almost drop by drop. Her medicine in the same way.”

He looked at Mrs. Stillwater, whose countenance did not change, except to settle into more dutious lines, and said softly, “A glass of water, please.”

Mrs. Stillwater glided out of the room.

Adam cast a furtive glance about him, then leaned over the little form, holding his breath. Lower, lower, till his lips pressed gently the pale forehead and lingered there with a yearning warmth.

The baby eyelids quivered and a light sigh escaped from the parched lips. But the long lashes were not lifted from the pallid cheeks.

Adam raised himself slowly. His face was pale and there was a strange thrumming in his ears.

The sultry heat seemed to palpitate through the room like a throbbing heart. The summer perfumes, stagnant in the dead air, made his brain reel. The strange new sentiment in his heart yet travailed in birth.

When had he kissed a human being! Perhaps when he was a baby some one might have kissed him. Perhaps so! —Perhaps not! He must have had a mother! And again

that hysterical laugh gurgled like a stifled groan in his throat.

Mrs. Stillwater flowed back into the room like a breath of cold air. He took the glass from her hand with trembling fingers. From the case by his side he lifted a little vial and began to drop the liquid into a teaspoon.

One, two, three, four!—The child sighed and a rush of uncounted drops fell into the spoon.

He poured them back.—One, two, three, four, five!—He felt the little clinging fingers about his own and his hand trembled at the memory. How light the touch, how tender, how unreal! How strange that he should have kissed her.—He, the child murderer! She, Timosa's child!—The spoon overflowed and the medicine splashed down into the glass.

He turned it back impatiently, and began again, determinedly chaining his wandering thoughts to their task.

"Every half hour," he said shortly, filling the glass partly full of water. "I shall be back soon."

He sprang into his carriage and crammed his broad hat down over his eyes. The outside air brought back to him his usual mood. He sneered at himself in the old hard way.

"You fool! Thirty-one years old and making an ass of yourself over a baby! Burbank gained clever slaves when he sold himself to the devil! Great Heavens! who but Burbank and the devil could have planned it so well. Never a word, never a sign, but just a steady, still pursuit—a dead baby,—a dying son-in-law,—a dead daughter,—and again a dying baby. The Burbank succession!—The Burbank curse! He wrecks the life-boat and his dead and dying wash up against my door. Where is he? Some-

where outside the storm, charmed, proof against the gale !
Ha, ha, ha ! Who says truth is not stranger than fiction !”

Adam drove from place to place through the stifling air, under the blistering rays of sun that seemed to pour down thin streams of molten gold. The bitterness burned slowly out of his heart. He grew morose and sullen and his patients drew away from him in new discomfort. But this mood also passed away, and with the fall of the twilight the strange tenderness of the morning crept fearfully back to his heart. Again his throat swelled with the memory of the clinging fingers and the suffering eyes. He began to repeat to himself, “I must save her ! I will save her !”

Meanwhile an important conversation had taken place in the room next to where the little invalid lay.

After the doctor's departure, Silas Stillwater came in to inquire about the child's condition.

His wife beckoned him into another room.

“He thinks she is very sick,” she said. “I do not believe he expects her to live.”

The minister's face grew deathly pale. “Did he say so ?” he gasped.

“No,” she replied, “he did not say so in that many words, but everything he said led me to think so. Besides, she looks very near to death now. Go in and judge for yourself !”

“No, no !” he faltered. “I would rather not. I can't go ! Besides, I have something to say to you, Clarissa.” The minister moistened his dry lips with a glass of water standing near, and wiped the backs of his hands nervously with a crumpled handkerchief.

His wife paused in calm surprise, her cold white hand resting upon the back of a chair in front of her.

Silas Stillwater tried to meet her steady, passionless gaze, but his eyes shifted before it, and he cleared his throat with a shaky "ahem" while he struggled for words.

"The fact is, my dear," he commenced haltingly. "Winona's life means a great deal to us in—in a great many ways. It was a great trust, a—a great responsibility, and not the easiest thing to manage to the best advantage, by any means."

He stopped abruptly and cast an anxious glance at her, as though he hoped she already divined his meaning and would spare him further explanation.

Meeting no more hopeful sign than a deepened surprise upon her face, he continued:—

"You know, my dear, that there was quite a little sum of money left me in charge for Winona. It was my duty as a faithful steward to—to a put the money to the exchangers, as it were, that when she comes of age she can receive her own with—with usury."

He paused with a weak smile and glanced again at his wife whose face had grown more coldly calm, and absolutely colorless.

"These have been troublous times, you know, since the war. I have been most unfortunate,—most unfortunate, my dear Clarissa."

Still she did not speak, though the hand on the back of the chair seemed to shrink, and the nails turned blue.

He became nettled at her silence and his voice raised perceptibly as he went on.

"To be sure I am responsible to no one in the discharge of my duties. One must take chances sometimes if one is to do anything in this world. I have done the best I could for you and—and both the children, and as I said before, I

am responsible to no one. De Monteano left it entirely with me."

"Responsible to no one," repeated his wife, her white lips pinched and trembling; her blue nails beating unconsciously the back of the chair. "Responsible to no one—but God!"

"Oh, my dear Clarissa! Of course, of course! I couldn't forget that,"—with a forced, quavering laugh. "I mean purely as a matter of business, my dear, a matter of business. If Winona gets well, I trust the money can be redeemed in good time, and all this trouble righted. It would be very unfortunate if—if she died at this time, poor little child, it would indeed! She's a good little thing, too, Clarissa, and you've been more than a mother to her, my dear,—more than a mother, I'm sure."

His wife paid no attention to his flattering remarks. She seemed not to have heard them. Suddenly transfixing his shifting gaze with her steely eyes she said icily:—

"Did you lose the money in speculation, Silas?"

"Well, now, my dear!" he gurgled nervously, "it's not necessary to call a purely business transaction by that name. The very best of people are in it nowadays, and think nothing of it."

"That will do, Silas, that will do!" she said, commandingly, raising her hand, the blue veins showing like vines on her white wrist and palm. "You have broken your promise to me! You have deceived me! You have even *lied* to me!" And she swept past him, her face fairly livid.

He tried to take her hand as she brushed by, but she shook off his fingers as though they had been adders, holding up her own limply and looking at them as though they had been stung.

She left him trembling in his chair, with a cowed look on his pallid countenance, and there he sat, stock still, until a peal of the door-bell aroused him.

He glanced out of the window and saw the doctor's carriage before the door. He heard the doctor's step in the hall.

Bowed and trembling, he rose from his chair. His manhood had fallen from him like a garment. He skulked to the door of the sick-room and listened like a thief in the darkness.

He could just catch the doctor's low tones. "No better—even weaker,—I cannot give much hope."

Silas shivered. He remembered that Dr. Links was physician at the villa for some time. Surely he would be one of the first to ask what had become of Winona's fortune, if Winona died. It was more than likely that De Monteano had taken his physician, in some measure, into his confidence.

The perspiration stood out on his forehead in great beads. He heard his wife's voice, calm and cold as usual, answering the doctor's low-voiced questions. His very heart shriveled at the thought of meeting her steely gaze again. How ruthlessly she had stripped his quivering soul bare! How icily she gazed down upon its nakedness! He dared not think of those other earlier sins, that were smoldering under the thin, dry crust of religion. He felt that the hidden corruption might break out at any moment and pour over the glossed surface like red-hot lava. He rolled his tongue around in his parched mouth and listened.

"If you will allow me I will stay here to-night," the doctor was saying.—Had he heard something? Did he suspect anything?—"To-night will be a crisis in the disease. I have a great desire to watch the turn. It may be the saving of her life to be here just in time."

His wife quietly assented. Silas Stillwater drew away from the door with stealthy tread.

It came nine o'clock. The doctor motioned them all out of the room and prepared to watch. The child had scarcely opened her eyes since he came in. She had not recognized him or spoken a word.

He drew a chair softly to the bedside. The little breast rose and fell regularly. Now and again an expression of suffering passed like a cloud over the pinched features.

Presently she stirred and murmured faintly, "Drink, drink."

Adam served the cooling liquid he had prepared, drop by drop. As it fell upon her lips and tongue, she swallowed feebly and her eyes fluttered open in a comprehending gaze. The doctor bent over her tenderly, smoothing back gently the matted hair. She looked searchingly at the strange face above her and he saw, with a sickening heart-throb, a quiver of fear dawning in her wondering eyes.

He spoke to her tenderly, soothingly, in a voice he could not recognize as his own, "Winona, little Winona." Gradually the look of wonder and affright passed away and an expression of confidence and content crept in. Then the heavy lids dropped slowly, and the dark fringes swept again the wan cheeks.

Adam slipped his warm, throbbing palm under the wasted little hand, and held his breath.

The tiny fingers crept searchingly along.—Adam trembled.—A moment more and they twisted confidingly about his.—The little life had at last found a *home*,—a home in a loving heart.

Mrs. Stillwater, gliding to the door next morning, found the doctor sitting on a low hassock by the side of the bed,

his head bowed upon his hands. Winona's wasted little fingers lay upon his hair. She was fast asleep. There was not a sound in the room.

The good lady wondered, but no heart intuition gave her comprehension. And she had her own pressing troubles to think about.

She crept away and left them there together.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR the next two days little Winona slept the long sleep of returning health.

Adam came and went. Each time, he left with a brighter face.

There was a perfect understanding now between the doctor and the child. Her first smile was a sunbeam breaking upon his face. He felt that he had been transported to Heaven.

His patients would not have known him in Winona's sick-room,—this doctor with the soft voice, the tender sympathetic face, the gentle movements.

But soon he began to carry his sunshine into other sick-rooms, and patient and nurse looked into each other's faces and said, "What has come over the doctor?"

After a while the child grew strong enough to sit up; then Adam begged to take her with him in his carriage, and the fresh air fanned the delicate color slowly back to her pale cheeks.

What those hours were to the starved heart and soul of Adam his little patient could never know.

She rallied very rapidly after the first change, as children do, and soon her merry laugh rang out in sheer gladness and gayety. She chattered by his side like a little magpie, and he was never tired of her voice.

The strong affection which had sprung up between them

was as great a blessing to the child as to the silent, reserved man. She was too young yet to comprehend her position in the household of the Stillwaters. That painful experience was yet to come. But the constant, chilling repression would have early done its work, but for this unrealized relief of Adam's company.

When the days were especially hot and sultry and Adam saw the delicate little head droop to something of its old languor, he would hurry with his precious charge to Anastasia Beach, where the breeze blew cool and fresh from the heaving breast of the ocean.

Reaching the hard-beaten seashore, he would drive briskly all its glistening length, till a faint color came peeping into the little cheek leaning fondly against his arm. And the glow creeping into her face was like the warmth of Heaven stealing into his own soul.

Sometimes, he would take her out of the carriage and seat her beside him upon the hillocks of gleaming white sand. This she loved best of all, for Adam—as he taught her to say—was her plaything here.

She filled his pockets full of tiny shells and covered him with heaps of sand. She towled his thick dark hair into a shaggy mane, patted his cheeks with her soft baby hands, and kissed his forehead and closed eyes with her rosy lips. She saw nothing strange or forbidding in that love-transfigured face, in those badly-mated eyes—and when she was weary with her happy frolic, she would cuddle down in his arms and lay her head to sleep against his breast.

Adam could never get quite used to the wonderful joy of it. He often said to himself from the very depths of his heart, "God bless her!" It seemed quite natural to pray for her.

He could think of Timosa now, with this child of hers happy in his arms. And instead of saying to himself "She will never know, she will never know!" he found himself thinking, "Can she know? Could it be possible she knows?"

When he returned to his home at night and lifted the customary glass of liquor to his lips, he thought of Winona, and put it down. She had turned away from him once, displeased with the smell of liquor on his lips. He had felt hot and cold all over before the child's innocent questions and inquiring eyes.

Gradually the bottles became cobwebbed in their closet. He scarcely missed them under the influence of this new intoxicating wine of trustful love.

Since little Winona had drawn back affrighted at the sound of a profane word, an oath stumbled upon his lips. Adam was beginning to forget that there was anything to curse in this life, so fair in the sunshine of a child's smile.

Some people thought it strange that Silas Stillwater should allow his charge so much in the company of this man, whom no one knew anything about. But Silas Stillwater had other things to think of, and no one would have presumed to approach the minister's wife on any subject pertaining to the management of her own household.

In the privacy of his study Silas fairly gnashed his teeth at his own foolishness. Winona was alive and well. No questions need be asked for years to come. Why had he been such a fool as to confess his secret to his wife before there was absolute necessity?

He could not overcome that maddening, whipped feeling whenever he was in her presence. She had never mentioned the subject to him since she swept out of the room and left him tingling with shame, and cold with everlasting

disgrace. Her household moved like clockwork. The duties of a minister's wife were carried out to the very letter of the law. There was no spot upon which he dared to put his finger in retaliation.

Silas was doing penance now, not at intervals, but day in, day out, with no hope of absolution. The fire of untamed passion burned in the man's veins. He thought his wife would freeze his blood. It had been a weight to carry his secret around with him, locked safely in his own breast. But now that secret had taken form. It was dumb. It harassed him with no criminations or complaints, but it was eloquent with a thousand silent tongues that lashed him with whips of scorpions. It shot barbs of steel at him across his own table. It looked clear through him, like the All-seeing Eye, and stared up into his face when he was on his knees at morning prayer. It laid down silently by his side at night, rose solemnly before him in the morning, and stole softly in and out of his study door through the long hours of the day.

His child seemed to become a part of this embodied secret. Belle he had called her. But she rang no merry peals of childish joy into his ears.

She was a quiet, creeping little thing with a tiny blue-white face and spiderlike body. She carried her thin little hands on a level with her narrow chest, hanging limply from her upraised wrists, like a hare, erect, reconnoitering for sudden flight. Her thin, pale hair was drawn plainly back in two short wispy braids, and her mother's eyes looked wisely out from her weazen little face.

Silas sometimes caught her up in a sudden transport of affection. Then she sat primly balanced upon his knee, with her demure little legs hanging stiffly down. The moment he released his hold about her waist, a sudden stiffening of

her rigid little body would slip her quietly to the floor and she would glide noiselessly out of his sight like a frightened mouse.

Little Winona was like a sunbeam to him. He could have hated her because she had brought this secret of her wasted fortune into his life. But how could he hate the only joyous, dancing, bounding thing in the house!

Sometimes, as he lay awake at night, the happy face, in its frame of golden curls, would grow slowly out of the darkness and flash before his eyes. Then another face, the face of that quick-perceived resemblance, would push the other away and take its place. Then the minister's cowering face would glow a dull red in the darkness,—and he was thankful for the night.

One day Winona had fluttered through the room singing like a nightingale. Silas caught her in his arms as she went, and tossed her in the air, then hugged her to his breast in unwonted abandon. Setting her upon her feet with a kiss, he raised himself, all hot and flushed from the unusual frolic, and met such a piercing glare from his wife's fixed eyes that the blood rushed precipitately back to his heart.

If she had struck him a blow he could not have understood her meaning better. She was jealous of the child! If so, why? For God's sake, why?

Silas felt that torturing wave of hot and cold creeping over him once more, when it suddenly occurred to him that it was because Winona's money had brought the first distrust of him. Simply that and nothing more. He was glad it was nothing more. After all, what more was there? He knew nothing himself except that this child, Winona, De Monteano's adopted daughter, looked strangely like—But fudge! Such things only occur in novels.

After that day a change came over Winona's life. A thousand little petty tyrannies and abuses were heaped upon her innocent head. A mean discrimination was shown between the two children. She was repressed, and hedged in, and silenced at every turn. She was spied upon, and sneered at and cramped in all her little childish frolics and innocent amusements. She was constantly compared with Belle, to her own disparagement.

Her guardian continued to show her a certain affection, but he caught her upon the stairs or in the garden,—anywhere out of sight of his wife's eyes. When he was in that chilling presence his face was as coldly critical and severe as her own.

He found Winona one day before the mirror in the long hall, decked out in discarded finery, and sweeping along gleefully with the old colored servant's expansive apron trailing behind her. He looked down into her flushed, happy little face and smiled, patting her on the head. She was gayer still after that, and even shook her round little legs in a brisk caper, in imitation of the darkies dancing upon the green. But all at once she looked up out of the tangled curls that were tossing in her eyes, and gave a little cry of sudden shame, as she met Mrs. Stillwater's withering glance.

The minister's wife was like a ghost. She appeared and disappeared. Her catlike tread gave never a warning sound, and her awful glances fell into secret places or upon innocent joys with equally blighting force—like a flash of deadly lightning.

She took the trembling child by the arm without a word and dragged her into her husband's study.

Winona felt a little wave of relief creeping over her.

"Do you see this child's sinful folly, growing under our

very roof? Prancing and dancing before the mirror like the child of an actress? I will have no more of such an example set before Belle. She shall be punished, and *you* shall punish her!"

The man grew rather white about the lips, but he looked up from his book and said sternly—though there was a shifty expression in his eyes,—“Winona, go to your room for the day. You can have nothing but bread and water while you are there!”

The child drew a quick breath of amazement and grief, but obeyed him without a word. She was only seven years old, but she never forgot it. She had no further pleasure in his caresses.

When she crept sadly out of her room the next morning, her face was flushed with weeping, and she could not meet any of the three pairs of eyes levelled upon her. Her sore little heart was full, and as she bent over her plate the slow tears dripped down upon her untasted food.

Silas Stillwater pushed his own plate testily away, saying that he had a headache, and after swallowing a cup of coffee repaired gloomily to his study.

Mrs. Stillwater regarded the child with grim complaisance, but with an unfulfilled determination in her set face.

After the meal was over she drew Winona into her own bedroom, and, without a word, snipped off all the golden curls, leaving them in a shining mass upon the floor.

Poor Winona did not know where to hide her shamed face or her broken little heart. She felt that her cropped head was the unsightly badge of a dishonor which could never be covered up. Her heart turned longingly to her one sympathetic friend. Would he never come! She dared not ask to go to him, as she had often been allowed to do, for, child

though she was, she felt that the piercing eyes of Mrs. Stillwater could divine her inmost thoughts.

To her great joy the doctor called that afternoon to take her for a drive.

Mrs. Stillwater's first thought was to refuse, but her second was a thought more politic. She did not dare to antagonize this sinister man who had conceived such a protective fondness for their ward. She had an intuitive conception of what his temper would be if aroused against them in behalf of his little friend. Then, too, she remembered his old interests at the villa, and the dishonoring facts that might be brought to light if he should ever dream of an injustice in their guardianship. So after a moment of suspense Winona was told to make herself ready.

Adam noted the cropped head and the tear-swollen eyes the moment she made her appearance, but he lifted her into the carriage without a word.

Once out of sight of everyone, Winona buried her head in his breast and cried anew, but the tears were like the last shower after a rain. Shed upon Adam's breast, they only relieved her sore heart.

Slowly the poor little story came out. Adam grew more and more anxious as he listened. He had felt the atmosphere of the house, though he had seen little. And he asked himself where it would all end. He pressed the little creature closer in his arms and ground his teeth, swearing softly under his breath that no one should trample on her gentle heart while he had a spark of life in his body. He fondled the shorn head tenderly with his awkward hands, and comforted her in a man's own peculiar way.

"It was better to have the curls off; think how light and cool her head would be. No more pulling and twisting, Eh,

little kitten?" and he lifted the downcast face and smiled encouragement into the blinking eyes. "She must not think that Mrs. Stillwater had cut them off to punish her, but only to make her more comfortable." Clumsy and not very reasonable comfort, but the love behind it was broad and deep, and it was love the child needed, not reason.

He soon had her smiling and chatting in something of the old way. But her trouble had passed into his own heart. He had no claim on this little life now grown so indispensable to his own,—no claim but that of his almost worshipful love. The idea of being separated from her had never yet taken deep root in his mind, but now it came forcibly to him, and he could think of nothing else. How could he ever live again without this child? A deep groan escaped from his lips, and Winona looked up in wonder. "What's the matter, Adam? You're not goin' to cry about the curls, are you? I don't care about them one bit now. Don't you mind!" she said soothingly, turning comforter in a quick, womanly little way which both charmed and saddened him.

"I was only thinking what I could ever do without you, little Winny," he said chokingly, "what I could ever do without my little friend."

"Oh, you needn't do without me," she cried, reassuringly! "I won't go away from you, Adam. I'll come every day to see you if Mother Stillwater will let me."

A lump came in Adam's throat as he thought of the formidable "if." He saw in a moment that if Mrs. Stillwater were giving the child ought to complain of, she would soon sever a friendship that would afford her charge a sympathetic ear in which to complain.

He kissed fervently the little hand that was patting his

own, and said in a voice he strove in vain to make cheerful:—"You can't always be a little girl, and my little playmate, Winny."

"Oh, I know that, dear," she said brightly; "but when I grow up and learn how to do everything I'll come to live with you always,"—and she folded her hands seriously in her lap and gazed solemnly ahead of her, as if she were impressed with the magnitude of all the things that would have to be learned before that important day.

Adam caught his breath and stared at the child vaguely, while a crowd of strange thoughts flitted through his brain. He whipped up his horse excitedly and the veins stood out upon his forehead in the intensity of sudden emotions that burst pell-mell into the hidden chambers of his heart. He gazed at Winona as if he expected to see a new vision of herself rise softly and silently beside her; but she only looked demurely into the future with her great childish eyes and said with a half sob, "If I ever have any little girls, Adam, I'll never cut off their hair like Mother Stillwater, and you'll never do like Father Stillwater did, will you?"

"No, no, darling," he gasped. "No, indeed!"

"I guess we had better go home now, my pet," he said, huskily, a little later.

"All right, Adam," she replied, drawing a quick sigh. "I wish I was old enough to live with you now, don't you, Adam?"

"O God, yes! No! What am I saying! Kiss me, dear. One sweet kiss now before we turn around," he said, uncovering his head.

"You swore again, Adam!" said the child in a trembling voice, turning her head away and looking down.

"No, no, darling, Adam didn't swear. That was a

prayer, my precious, a prayer for you, Winny, and a prayer for me," he pleaded chokingly. "Can't you understand?"

"Oh, don't you mind then, dear!" she said regretfully. "I'll give you twenty kisses for thinkin' a story against you," and she wound her arms about his neck and her kisses dropped like falling rose-leaves on his brow, hair, eyes and lips.

Adam hurried home, wandering through his tasks mechanically as in a dream.

The strange, peaceful, unthinking content of the past three years had been swept away. In its place there reigned a feverish, half-formed hope, by turns alluring and mocking, glowing with promise, then fading and dying away.

All night he tossed upon his bed, torn between conflicting emotions of hope and despair.

"If the Stillwaters abuse her she will have no one but you. Her father's relatives know nothing of her. Burbank shall never have her!" said Hope.

"What are you thinking of, foolish mortal? Where are all these thirty-four years of life already crushing down upon your head? Will your age turn back to rest and sleep while her young life is budding into promise?" sneered Despair.

"You have the right of every man to win a bride. She loves you with all her childish heart, why not with her woman's heart as well?" urged Hope defiantly.

"Fool!" cried Despair exultingly. "Have you forgotten the dead baby? The dead baby, I say, her *brother*! Do you hear? Have you forgotten that?"

Adam groaned in the silence of the night. "O God! Can I never get away from it,—the curse of that one night's blind work? Never! Never! Even the devil has forsaken me! Why is my heart so soft? Why do I love that

little thing so? Why did I ever see her? O great Heaven! what a world this is!"

While Adam lay tossing upon his bed, Silas Stillwater was unfolding to his wife, the plan and reason for an important change in their lives. The room was perfectly dark, and Silas felt brave accordingly.

"Clarissa," he ventured in a conciliatory tone, "I have decided that it is best to take a pastorate North."

"A very sudden piece of news," said his wife coldly.

"It is somewhat sudden to me," he replied. "I received a call from a New York church in the evening mail. The prospects are better, the salary larger, and there are various other reasons why it would be to our advantage to make a change," he went on, trying to speak carelessly.

"Decidedly so," said his wife in a hard, dry voice. "Many and good reasons. Chief among them, the advisability of taking your ward out of Dr. Links's hands—and memory, if possible. It will scarcely do to allow the young lady to learn anything about the bequest that is supposed to be coming to her when she is of age."

Silas's flesh crept in the darkness.

"Sin always breeds a succession of secrets. Marriage has made us one. Together we will spend our lives covering up the serpent's trail! Good-night!"

Silas lay as still on the bed as if stricken with a mortal wound. By and by he heard his wife's regular reathing beside him. The moon crept up and peered in at the window. Its great, expressionless, yellow face, smiled stupidly upon his cheerless bed, and then glided slowly out of sight, leaving a long ghost-like streak across the snowy counterpane, and upon his wife's cold white beauty of face and ashen hair.

He wondered how a corpse might look that lay dead of poison, and his morbid fancy imagined a white froth flecking her lips.

Only a few weeks later and the preparations for departure were all complete.

Winona was to pay Adam a farewell visit. A great occasion in her life,—and his.

The colored cook set out a charming little spread, and beamed over the dainty table with a black face full of pride. His woolly head shook excitedly, as he muttered to himself, "Such a queer thing, now, for Dr. Adam to do!"

Adam stood in the door as the little figure tripped along, dressed in the whitest of white frocks, and fluttering with the importance of her first invitation out.

"She shall have a gay time," he said to himself. "She shall have the brightest memories of her last visit—Winona!"

He stood in the door to meet her, and held out his arms, taking her little hands in his. Then he stooped and kissed her on the forehead. "Welcome, dear; I am glad to see you."

The child gave a little embarrassed cough and smile, as though the grown-up greeting had been in keeping with the grown-up occasion, (Adam usually took her in his arms and kissed her on the cheek) and she found it rather hard to come up to the dignity of the requirement.

She laid off her little hat primly, and Adam placed her at the table opposite his own seat.

"Now, you are the little wife, the little mother," he said, with a peculiar tenderness in his voice.

This further increased her demure and dignified sweetness. She poured Adam's tea with delighted care, and watched him every mouthful that he swallowed, as though her service must have made it doubly sweet.

The old servant hovered about them, pressing them with dainties. "Now won't you have a speck more of this, little mistis, and some more of that, Mars Doctor?"

And as Winona feasted on the unaccustomed dainties, her funny little reserve vanished like dew before the sun. Her tongue was set loose, and she laughed and chatted in a long stream of delightful childish vagaries.

"I will send you lots of beautiful things, Adam, when I get to New York. Belle and I will go to a new school where there are lots of little girls, and lots of little boys. I shall learn to write, Adam, and then I will write you long, long letters. When I come back, I shall write your letters for you, and then you will give me the pretty ink bottle on the alligator stand, and I shall sit in the corner there and write, till you come home to supper."

"Yes, dear, yes," cried Adam gayly, "and we shall have the little sweet cakes you like so well,—every night till Pompey gets tired of baking them."

"Oh, how nice, how nice! How I wish New York, and the boys and girls and the school, were all over, and I was coming to live with you now, Adam, with all these nice things. Don't you, Adam?"

"Yes, dear, yes!" assented Adam catching his breath and choking.

"Are you choked, Adam?" she cried excitedly. "Let me pat you on the back," and she flew down from her perch and thumped him distractedly on the back with her little hand.

"That will do, dear! That will do," laughed Adam, the tears rolling down his face. "I shall be all right now."

"I guess I am through, Adam, if you will excuse me," said the child, with an air of relief. "I won't get up again if you don't mind."

Then she sat by his side with her hand in his, and he told her stories while Pompey cleared away the dishes. After that he took her through the house, answering patiently all her childish questions, and listening eagerly to the long flow of her ceaseless prattle.

"Well! I must soon go home now," she said at last, drawing a long sigh at the thought of breaking away from all this delight.

Adam's hand trembled, holding hers, and the voice he had willed should be merry sank to a low sadness that made Winona look up wistfully into his face.

"Come with me, dear," he said, "come with me!"

He took her back into his chamber and pointed to the snow-white bed.

"Just lay your head against the pillow for a moment, Winny dear. There! Now when I sleep to-night I shall think of you. Whenever I lay my head upon my pillow and you are far, far away from me, I shall say, 'Here is where my little Winny laid her head,—against my pillow.' Will not that be sweet? And, darling, when you say your prayers at night, say, 'God bless my Adam.' You will have the girls and boys about you, little one, but I shall be all alone,—only the memory of my little Winny in my heart. I shall never forget you, darling. Never! Never! Always remember that."

He dropped down on his knees and folded her in his arms, laying his big head gently against her breast.

"Now kiss me, darling, and say 'God bless my Adam!'" Take this little ring and, remember, dear,—you are little now, but you can remember, I know—if ever you want me, if ever you need me, and any one tells you you shall not write to me, send me this little ring. This shall be our secret,

Winona, you must not tell any one about it. Do you understand? And will you remember?

"Now good-bye, darling. Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye!"

The tears were dropping from the child's eyes. Adam's emotion and his broken solemn tones bore upon her little heart the reality of their parting.

"I don't want to go away and leave you, Adam! Oh, Adam, Adam!" she wailed, her tears falling on his upturned face and mingling with his. "Don't you cry, Adam, I will come back. I will come back to stay with you always."

"Hush, dear, and remember all that I have told you," he faltered, drying her tears with clumsy, trembling fingers.

He took her in his arms once more and strained her to his breast. Then he carried her downstairs. Soon he had beguiled away all sadness with her favorite stories of baby alligators and funny little turtles deep down in their muddy homes.

She trotted contentedly by his side as he led her home and parted with him at the door with hopeful childish words of future meeting.

Two days later, the Stillwaters' home was deserted.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was early spring.

Darkness had brooded long in its nightly vigil over the clustering woods and spreading meadows of the Bearall farm.

Beneath the dank pressure of its somber wings the floating moisture in the hushed air had settled silently down over the life-pulsing earth, and moistened its chill brow with a heavenly baptism. The drifting vapors gathered themselves together and kissed each other into new birth, till in myriad trembling dewdrops they hung for a moment suspended on bursting leaf-buds and tiny twigs flushed with new blood, then distilled themselves anew upon the thirsty earth.

Little by little, silent as the birth of Love, the gray dawn unfurled its slumber-enthralled wings, and spread its silver length in a broad crescent span across the sky. The breast of night gathered a somber grayness from the diffusing light, and lifting its gloomy visage it floated reluctantly up and away.

Free at last, the joyous dawn took possession of the boundless firmament. The east blushed rosy red. Across the broad horizon Aurora flung great shafts of irised glory. The day waited in quivering expectancy. A redder glow! A bursting flame of light! A great trembling of the silent forms of air! A hush! A bounding throb!—And the sun-god leaped into his chariot—and away! The vault of heaven thrilled with light, and earth awoke.

The cock with the copper-tinged plumage dropped hastily from his perch and, flapping his lordly wings awoke his feathered harem with a shrill crow that brought the drowsy heads from their cosy covers with a jerk.

Down from their roost his fat consorts flopped clumsily, one by one, and driving their sharp bills vigorously up and down among their warm feathers, hastily made their morning toilet. The cows in the distant pasture heaved their clumsy weights laboriously from the steaming prints of their warm bodies, and moved lowing toward their home. The colts trotted anxiously to the bars, and with nostrils quivering and ears laid back whinnied eagerly for their master. The geese flew from their shelter under the hovel with a sharp beating whirr of their strong wings, and the long line of glossy ducks waddled heavily off to the barnyard pond.

Farmer Bearall breathed a long sigh of slow awakening, and then started up with an exclamation, as a sunbeam smote him in the face.

"Dear me!" he muttered, springing hastily out of bed. "I have overslept myself. Why didn't mother wake me?"—And then he bethought himself that he had not slept well, that he and mother had not gone to rest on speaking terms.

"Poor little sonny! Poor little bubby!" he repeated to himself, as he donned his rough garments. "That boy didn't do it! I'd bet my bottom dollar he didn't take it! But how under heavens are we goin' to make mother believe it?"—And he sighed abstractedly and shook his fast-whitening head. If mother gets an idea in her head, you couldn't bore another one in with a gimlet, or saw the old one out with a buzz-saw. Law bless me! what are we going to do? I wish Milly was here!"

The old man plodded out of the house and started for the

pasture, but he saw that the cows were no longer there. Then he turned his steps to the spring lot to liberate the colts.

As he reached the top of a little knoll overlooking this enclosure, his heart gave a great tug in his honest breast as he saw a boyish figure leaning upon the bars, with his face buried in his arms, while the impatient colts nuzzled their noses in his neck and breathed their warm breath upon his cheek.

The good farmer drew the back of his rough hand across his eyes and then swung rapidly along.

The boy heard him coming and hastily started from his despondent position, drew out the bars and let them fall, ringing with a long reverberation, one upon the other. The colts leaped through the opening and started on a sharp gallop for the barn. Father Bearall hastened up just as Wilton was slipping the last bar back into place.

"Hallo, sonny!" he cried, in rather a shaky voice. "I guess I overslept myself this morning; didn't doze off very good last night. You're round bright and early. Got the cows all in a'ready ain't you?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy with averted face and husky voice.

"Now, you look here, son!" blurted the farmer with hearty simplicity. "Don't you do no mopin' round here, losin' your appetite and your good looks at the same time;" (giving the boy a playful slap on the shoulder.) "I want you to understand right now, that I ain't believin' no unlikely story about you, no way an' no time. Your old grandpop 'ill stick by you through thick and thin, and the Angel Gabriel couldn't do no more!" he declared vehemently, but with an inward quaking as he thought of this

obvious disloyalty to his wife. I'd as soon think of my little Milly takin' that money, as you, if you ain't got no pedigree. I don't go no great shocks on pedigree, nohow 'nless I know the man that's got it. If I know a man an' there ain't no small potatoes about him, then I sez to myself "Prob'ly his pedigree ain't far off." But I ain't for judgin' a man's a natural born thief cause his pedigree got lost in a great wollipin' big place like New York city, an' war time at that. Ain't that about the way you feel, sonny?"

"You're awfully good to me, Mr. Bearall," faltered the boy, swallowing a sob. "If you believe I'm honest, I guess I can stand all the rest, though it seems to me sometimes the food she's been cooking 'ill choke me to death. If I live to be a man, you'll never be ashamed of me. I'll make my own name, till people forget I didn't have a pedigree, he declared proudly, drawing himself up, while his glistening black eyes flashed fire at threatening fate."

"That's right! That's right, sonny! You've got the right stuff in you to make a man. The good Lord don't let no sech fellows as you keep a back seat forever. Brace up, now! Brace up! We've got to get them cows milked."

They trudged off to the barn together, the man's heart lightened, and the face of the boy once more filled with hope and sturdy determination.

The morning chores were soon done up. Wilton entered the house with sinking heart, but Mrs. Bearall, bustling about the stove, with her lips set in a hard, straight line, made no comments.

After Father Bearall and Wilton had gone through a great washing and splashing on a bench outside the door, the three sat stiffly down to morning prayers.

Father Bearall opened his Bible carefully at the blue

ribbon mark. It had been his habit, in compliance with his wife's expressed ideas on the propriety of such a plan, to begin at the beginning of the Bible and read it through.

This had been her father's course,—and Mrs. Bearall didn't pretend to know any better ways than her father's ways. Moreover, she didn't know anybody that was more apt at quotin "scriptur" than her father's daughter, Catharine. Her fund of Old Testament quotations was really wonderful and she had learned them all at "mornin' prayers."

Consequently, when she and Isaac Bearall had set up housekeeping on their own grounds, she had slipped the blue ribbon mark in its place at the very first page of the Bible her father had given her for a wedding present.

The young husband had settled down manfully to his task. Not a page of "begats" or a list of antiquated pedigree had been skipped. When his children began to grow up, he had mildly suggested that certain chapters might be better, or more interestin' to children than others, but their mother had scouted at the idea of making any change for their benefit. Any part of the Bible had been good enough for her father, was good enough for her, and ought to be good enough for her children.

No one ever spoke a word during morning prayers. To have asked a question or stopped to explain a text would have been as great a violation of the solemn etiquette of the occasion as to have interrupted the minister in the exposition of his Sunday morning lesson. If the children shouldn't happen to understand, why the Bible was quite capable of takin' care of itself.

As it happened, Isaac was at this time reading in the book of Joshua.

Mother sat in the low rocker with her feet neatly tucked under her brown print skirt, her arms folded tightly across her bosom and her lips pursed up in a pious pucker.

Wilton sat stiffly in a high-backed chair, his feet, just escaping the floor, crossed in front of him, his fingers locked together in his lap.

Father Bearall laid the Bible open upon his palm and, passing the other big hand across its open pages, cleared his throat and began.

The text was not very interesting and "Father" was subject to fits of abstraction. He went on, grinding out the sentences in a monotonous sing-song tone, utterly unconcerned as to what he was reading. He was thinking what a miserable thing it was, to be sure, that poor little Wilton should be accused of stealing.

By and by he became conscious that Wilton was fidgeting in his chair. He looked up over his spectacles and saw a hot, flushed face and a pair of anxious imploring eyes. Mother's face was a little pale and her lips were compressed in an expression of righteous satisfaction. He went on with his reading.

"When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

Father Bearall knew what he was reading now and his words commenced to stumble. He read on, but his eyes began to glance furtively back upon the preceding page while he read.

"And Joshua said: Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with

stones, and burned them with fire, after that they had stoned them with stones."

The book shut with a bang that made Wilton jump, and almost brought Mother Bearall to her feet.

"Mother, you have changed the mark!" he said, in an awful voice. Then without waiting for her to speak he cried in a loud but solemn tone, "Let us pray!"

He dropped down heavily upon his knees. Wilton crouched in a shivering little heap in front of his chair, and Mother Bearall by sheer force of habit prostrated herself in front of hers.

Isaac had put his hand to the plow. There was no going back now. He was about to "wrestle" with the Lord for his wife's soul and the boy's good character. Grasping the seat of the chair with both hands he began:—

"O Lord, that did'st not cast the first stone at the woman who sinned, look down upon us and clear out our hearts till they be whiter than wool. Thou knowest that there might be some amongst us whose bowels of compassion are dried up. Cause them to be freshened up again, O Lord. Make us to remember that with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again. O Lord, let us not be so busy pullin' the mote out of our brother's eye that we cannot see the beam that is in our own eye. Help us to pity the fatherless, and turn all slanderin' tongues and slanderin' thoughts away from him. Let us not, O Lord, be over wise in our own conceit, for the wisdom of man is but folly in Thy sight. Let us not forget that whoso shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea. And now finally, O Lord, send Thy spirit of truth to wrestle with us and convict us of our sins, though the earth dry up,

and the sky darken, and the Heavens fall, and all things shall come to an end. Hear us, O Lord, for the glory of Thy Name in this household. Amen."

Father Bearall's voice had risen to a loud full tone, and his hand had come down on the seat of the chair with a force that brought the pot-lid jangling to the floor, but the last sentence ran down-hill till it was out of breath, and the Amen flew out of the window like a whisper. Father Bearall's courage was failing him as he thought of getting up from his knees.

His wife rose with a snort like that of an infuriated animal. Her eyes rolled in her head and her nostrils and lips twitched and quivered. She flung the breakfast dishes upon the table with a well-trained eye, else nothing would have saved them. Then she stalked out of the room. As she mounted the stairs to her bedroom a wild hysterical cry wailed back to them, "O Lord! Lord! now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace. The walls of Jerusalem have fallen and Thy servant is encompassed 'round about."

Father Bearall raised his eyes for a moment as she passed out, but turned back to the trembling boy and said cheerfully, "Eat your breakfast now, sonny, and then start off to school. You needn't worry one minute about that ten-dollar bill. I ain't no idea but what it will turn up in some outlandish place yet."

They both made a brave feint of eating, but it was little more than an apology to the food. By way of conversation Wilton said timidly, "It's most my birthday again, Grandpa!"

"You don't say so now!" said the farmer smiling feebly over his glasses as a long wailing cry of "Take me! Take me!" shivered down to them from above. "I had clean forgot the day. How old will you be then, sonny?"

"Thirteen years old," the boy replied, "Soon old enough to earn my living, I hope."

"Tut, tut, boy, no hurry," replied the farmer decidedly. "We're going to have you educated, you know. And you're goin' down to live with Aunt Milly after awhile, and go to school some more and learn to be a lawyer. I don't want both my boys farmers, do I now?" he asked, playfully patting the dark head.

"You're too good to me, sir!" said Wilton gratefully, with sudden moisture in his eyes. "I shall never be able to repay you."

"Don't want no pay!" was the reply, no pay more'n to have you turn out a good boy and you'll do that, I know!"

The sounds of choking and gasping floated down to them from the bedroom, and the farmer said gravely, "Now be off to school, my boy, double quick!"

As Wilton hastened away, Father Bearall began abstractedly to put away the breakfast dishes. His face was anxious and his big hands trembled as one unearthly sound succeeded another from the precincts above, but he went on with his task until it was completed. Then he repaired stolidly to his wife's room.

She lay prone upon her bed. Her eyes rolling, and her head tossing to and fro. Her lips were drawn back in a hysterical grimace and she was singing, praying, and weeping by turns.

She paid no attention to her husband's entrance, other than to contort her face in a more ghastly way and groan the more loudly.

Her husband moved about the room picking up a few things here and there, then stopped by the bed and gazed reflectively at her, saying to himself in a lugubrious tone:—

"Well, I've allus said that I didn't believe in none of these camp-meetin' manifestations of the Spirit, but, I'll allow it's got her now. Don't deal too hardly with her, O Lord, remember in Thy Providence that woman is the weaker vessel and deal with her accordin'."

He sat down in the big rocker and swayed slowly back and forth in a meditative way.

The tossing figure on the bed grew more wildly excessive in its moanings and prayers. Finally the old man rose thoughtfully from his chair and moving towards the bed again said slowly:—

"Catharine, can you hear me? Listen to me if you can (Oh it's a powerful hand the Lord has when He takes a hold!) Catharine, I'm goin' out in the old cornfield now to do my plowin'. If you want anythin' you can call me. I'll leave you now in the Lord's strong but merciful hand. May He bring grace to your soul! "

Father Bearall harnessed up his horses and went slowly to his task.

He watched mechanically the shining plow turn the smooth furrow of cool, damp soil, but his heart was heavier than his thickly-shod feet as he toiled along in the stony trench. The old horses must have wondered what had come over their master as they dragged dully along with never a voice of complaint shouting behind them. He flicked the reins on their broad backs and lifted the heavy plow into a new furrow with the precision of habit, but he did not count the shining rows as they multiplied themselves under his efforts. His heart was not in his work.

"O Lord," he was saying softly. "Thou knowest how much I've allus thought of her, that I wouldn't harm a hair of her head, And Thou knowest if some of them queer

notions could be driven out of her soul, there wouldn't be a better woman livin' on the whole top of Thy footstool. Drive them out, O Lord, drive them out! And help me to hold firm as adamant till they're gone. Give me back my dear old wife, clothed and in her right mind. For Thou knowest, O Lord, I love her as I loved her when she came to me first as a slim lovin' little bride!"—and a few hot tears rushed unbidden to the eyes of the suppliant.

Noon came and Father Bearall dutifully put up his horses and repaired to the house.

The fire was out. Not a thing had been done toward preparing the noon meal, and the voice from the bedroom rose to a hoarse frenzy as he opened the door.

He went upstairs and stood looking at the writhing, groaning figure on the bed, only saying sympathetically in camp-meeting phrase:—

"Can't you give up yet, mother?"

He received no answer but a mournful wail addressed to higher powers, so he went quietly downstairs and out to the barn. Sitting patiently upon the grain bin he waited until the horses had finished their noonday meal, then harnessed them up and went slowly back to his work.

Night came. Wilton returned from school and gazed wonderingly at the cold hearth. Father Bearall came in. Neither asked any questions or made any comments. Together they prepared their supper and ate it in silence.

The long evening crept away. Wilton pored over his books and Isaac over his paper, upside down close to his nose.

The night passed and another day dawned. The wrestling spirit in the little bedroom still wrestled, though now with longer intervals of quiet.

The scenes of the preceding day were repeated almost without change, and again the day's work was over.

Poor Father Bearall's hair seemed to have turned a shade grayer in those two days, and Wilton whispered about the house as though it had been stricken with death.

The horses had been put out, and once again the farmer came in to prepare for supper. All was quiet. He crept carefully up the stairs and to the bed.

"Father, will you get me a glass of water?" came in a subdued tone from the depths of the pillow.

"Well, mother! I guess I might get you a little thing like a glass o' water," he responded cheerfully, trying not to have his voice sound too glad.

He brought back a brimming glass, fresh from the well. "Little thing like a glass o' water don't amount to much after a man has endowed a woman with all his worldly goods and been addin' to 'em all these years," he said, wisely striking home the first important nail in the new domestic plans.

She took a long drink and handed the glass back with a nod of thanks. Father Bearall could hardly help hugging himself for joy. His wife threw herself back on the pillow and closed her eyes.

Isaac tiptoed downstairs and prepared a nice little supper, which he sent to the room by Wilton.

Wilton trembled under the weight of his errand, but he entered bravely.

"How are you, grandma?" he inquired in a quivering voice.

"Better," she replied shortly, but by no means unkindly.

Wilton went downstairs again, glad to be released, and once more the two, man and boy, ate their supper together.

No one knew what explanation took place in the little bedroom during the still hours of the night, but Mother Bearall appeared bright and early the next morning, and if her manner was somewhat subdued, her movements were none the less quick and telling. She served them a royal good breakfast, smoking hot, and as she handed "Father" his cup of coffee across the table, he observed gallantly:—

"Bein' sick two days has made your hands 'most as white as they was the day I married you, and I swan if it wasn't for the weddin' ring bein' so worn down, I couldn't be made to believe it was more'n yesterday."

He received a half-repressed smile of pleasure for this broad compliment and the day started in, under auspicious skies.

"As for the lost ten dollars," That'll turn up yet, don't fear, sonny!" said Father Bearall.

CHAPTER XV.

It was early in June, all was great activity in the little stone kitchen of the Bearall homestead. The good householders were on the point of taking summer boarders. An entirely new departure for them.

Like Wilton's installment in the family, it had all come about through Milly. The new minister of the church to which she belonged had just moved up from Florida, bringing with him a very sick child. It had been taken ill on the journey and still seemed utterly prostrated. Milly had advised the parents, after communicating with her father and mother on the subject, to take the child into the country for the summer. And into the country they were coming, to be, for a time, inmates of the Bearall household.

"Mother," who never let anything sleep around her, certainly had the family in a great state of wakefulness. There was to her a certain awe and mystery connected with ministers under all circumstances, and it certainly flustered her not a little to think of being in daily contact with a minister's family.

Father Bearall had but one objection to the proposed arrangement. He had a secret fear that taking boarders would invite a return of "Mother's" old delusion that she had always been the bread-winner in the family. This harassing malady had not shown itself, since that memorable "wrestle" with the Spirit, and he was inclined to be wary of any scheme which threatened to provoke a relapse.

However, he turned the matter carefully over in his mind and concluded that he might trust it to the Lord,—by keepin' a good eye open himself.

Wilton did not know whether to be pleased or sorry. Since the ten-dollar bill had been lost, he had become very sensitive about his "pedigree." Every new face meant a new explanation of his peculiar lack of family history, for Mrs. Bearall still adhered to her old determination not to bring him up with any wrong notions on the subject.

But the day arrived, and the trio stood out by the gate watching the return of the hired man with the added burden in the spring-wagon.

"The lady ain't very ruddy-lookin' herself, is she?" whispered the farmer, as the wagon-wheel grated against the horse block.

"How do you do, ma'am? I hope you're well," he said heartily, as he started forward to help her out. "So this is the little sick gal, is it? Let me take the little shaver while you get out." And he took Belle's limp, gray little form in his strong arms. "Not much left to her for a sartinity. Hallo! there ain't nothin' sickly lookin' about this one now is there!" he exclaimed, catching sight of a rosy face and sparkling eyes. "She looks like a real country gal already."

"This is our ward, Winona De Monteano," replied Mrs. Stillwater stiffly. "And this is your son, or grandson, I suppose," casting a pair of pale scrutinizing eyes in Wilton's direction.

"No, he ain't no relation to us," returned Mother Bearall receiving with a surprised recoil of her own hearty palm the devious offering of Mrs. Stillwater's limp, clammy hand.

They all repaired to the house. Father Bearall still carry-

ing the shrunken figure of little Belle, her wisps of braids hanging like matted corn-tassels over the sleeve of his best black Sunday coat.

The Bearalls did not find their boarder talkative, and Mrs. Stillwater soon begged to be excused, taking the two children with her to their rooms.

After the door closed behind her, Isaac remarked, with a long breath of relief. "Guess she ought to stayed down in Florida a little spell longer, till she got thawed out."

"Father, you better not be makin' any of your cuttin' remarks. You're old enough to have some respect for the Lord's servants. When I first shook hands with her, I thought myself she was a needin' special grace. Her hand felt to me like as if it might be one of them new false hands they're makin' now, and I thought mebbe one o' hers had got shot off down South somewhere. It seemed all right though when I got a good look at it."

"Wasn't the little yellow-haired girl pretty, grandpa," said Wilton edging close to the farmer, as Mother Bearall, bustled about closing doors and windows for the night.

"That she was, sonny!" responded grandpa heartily, "a likely lookin' little gal! But her name is enough to kill any Christian lass! Some French gibberish or other! Did you catch it, bubby?"

"Only the first part of it. It was Winona. I think it sounds very pretty, don't you? It makes me think of the rain on the hay-mow roof, and the water in the little meadow brook when the spring comes."

"Sonny," said the farmer softly, grasping the boy by the arm and peering anxiously into his expressive face, "I don't know but I'm doin' wrong to think of makin' a lawyer out o' you. Mebbe you was born to be a poet. I ain't sure

but I'm sorry for the first time that I don't know your pedigree. But jest you draw an easy breath over it, bubby. " 'Cause, if it ever is found, I'll bet my bottom dollar 'twon't have no small potatoes about it."

It was haying time, and Farmer Bearall was short of help. "Make hay while the sun shines" had been one of the religious maxims of the good farmer's life, and in the crisis he had yielded to Wilton's entreaties to allow him to stay out of school and help in the fields.

The boarders had made themselves quite at home by this time. Mrs. Stillwater spent most of the day out of doors sitting under the trees with her sick child. Belle was improving slowly, but was not strong enough to run about as did Winona.

A happy summer it was for the little orphan girl. The atmosphere in the home of the Stillwaters had become stifling to her, child though she was. She missed Adam sorely. Her pillow was often wet with tears when, after some sneering cutting remark or cruel injustice, she longed for the sympathetic ear and the sheltering breast of her doctor friend.

But the quick transition to the country was a wonderful help in bearing the separation, and Winona found her free, outdoor life a daily joy. She and Farmer Bearall had become great friends and she was allowed to follow him everywhere.

Mrs. Stillwater was never sorry to have Winona out of her sight. There was nothing congenial between the two natures, and, more than that, Mrs. Stillwater never looked at her without thinking of that slimy trail of sin that she and Silas Stillwater together were to spend their lifetime covering up.

The quiet mouse-like little Belle, with her stiff, thin figure and pale, grown up looking eyes, was like a continuation of

her own contracted heart-life. Winona was the red drop of blood that had brought fever into her veins.

The haying time was bright and sunny and the farmers' hearts were glad. Early in the dewy mornings Winona followed the clinking mowing-machine to the meadows. The grass would stand in all its emerald beauty, bending its delicate feather tops under drops of glistening dew, and swaying its heavy timothy tassels with the slow momentum of their own weight. The white-capped ebony-winged bobolink would flutter down over the fragrant forest of swaying grasses and grasping a stocky stem with his delicate feet, would pour forth a rich, rollicking carol of bird notes, while the over weighted grass stem rocked him back and forth threatening to cast him headlong into the billowing sea of green. But the fluttering little wings would hold the poise and with a rapturous burst of melody from his puffy warbling throat, and a reedy whirr of his glistening wings, he would sail straight as an arrow to some favorite covert, chased by the echoes of his own joyous song.

Presently a fresh morning zephyr would wander lazily over the field. Then the slender grasses would sway gently back and forth to its whispering, dulcet music, like a group of dancing maidens on the green. The dewdrops would shake from their powdered heads, and the cobweb tents dotted over the field would flutter in the air.

Winona loved to find some sheltering, wide-spreading tree under which she could sit and watch the mower at his work. She felt sorry to see the sharp blade cut into the tender grass, but as swath after swath fell before the knife, she ceased to feel their pangs and drank her little soul full of pastoral beauty and delight.

Sometimes she thought of Adam, and if her morning sun

had been darkened by a sneer or taunt, she would drop a tear to his memory and long for the time to come when she might "live with him always." When her new friend Wilton came to work in the field, a fresh joy was added to her days. The two became great friends. While the hay-wagon went to the barn creaking under its heavy load of hay, Wilton would remain with Winona in the field. Here they became very confidential.

She told him all about her own little life, all indeed that she knew,—which was not much. He felt sorry for her and yet strangely delighted to find that she was an orphan like himself. Then he confessed his own heartaches over the lost pedigree, and his voice was so husky and full of tears that Winona patted his hands and finally kissed him heartily. The boy was not used to kisses and glowed a rosy red; but the memory of the kiss was wonderfully—oh, wonderfully soothing.

Then she chattered about Adam, and her own voice was full of tears as she told him how Adam wept to have her go, and how she was one day going back to live with him always. Wilton would have kissed her in return only a great shyness held him back. But his sympathy was wholly for his little companion—it did not reach to Adam. He felt a sudden dislike for her unseen friend, whether it was because the memory of him made Winona too sad, or whether it was because it had the power to make her too glad, he did not stop to ask himself.

"What pretty curls you have!" said Winona, passing her plump brown hand through his waving black locks. "I had curls too, once," she said regretfully, "only mine were yellow," putting her hand to her cropped head and sighing. "Mother Stillwater cut them all off."

"What for?" asked Wilton, boy-like.

"Because I played before the glass!" she whispered, with a deep blush.

"Oh!" he replied wonderingly. He did not know but this might be a heinous sin for girls; he had never been told.

"There are some little ones growing out now," he said encouragingly, pulling a yellow ringlet from behind her ear.

"She'll cut them off again," said the child ruefully, "so I wish they wouldn't grow."

After this exchange of confidences the children were inseparable companions.

Oh, the frolics in the hay mow! The wonderful jumps from the loft, steaming with fragrance, to the barn floor padded with the same odorous cushion! The leap in air that catches the breath with a sharp hiss and flashes a firmament of stars before the eyes! Oh the soft beds in the new-mown clover, with the grasshoppers snaring themselves in your hair and the busy black ants climbing your sturdy little legs, like the Eastern slaves on the tower of Babel! Oh, the vision of a World Wonderful when you lay your ear close to the warm whispering earth and look into her miniature forest of meadow-trees, where the teeming life of myriad insects in their boundless forest home is like a revelation of another world, while you, with your great eyes staring into an unknowable infinity and your clumsy feet treading to death a million wonders as profound, have walked past it every day and knew not that it was there! Oh, the marvelous heart of childhood that hears the whispering voice of Nature saying, Low, low, lie low against my breast and I will show you the matchless works of God. "He hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

But an end came to this joyous playtime and this innocent companionship.

The three children were out under the pear trees,—for Belle was able to run about now, though far from strong. It was August, and Winona's birthday. Wilton was in the tree hunting for the most luscious fruit in honor of the day.

"Now, Nona," he cried, "look out! Here they come! Hold your apron! Three! Five! Six, seven, eight! And one for good measure!"

Then he scrambled down, flushed and panting.

"Why do you call me 'Nona'?" asked the child. "Why don't you call me 'Winny' as Adam does?"

"Because I want a name of my own for you," responded the boy with warmth. "Don't you think my name is the prettiest?" he asked. "Just listen now, 'Nona!' 'Winny.' Doesn't mine sound the softest and prettiest?"

"No! yes!" said the child hesitating. And then in a tone of relief,— "I guess 'Winny' sounds the prettiest when Adam says it, Wilton, and 'Nona' sounds the prettiest when you say it."

Wilton looked but half satisfied. However, he made no protest, and they all sat down to the enjoyment of ripe pears.

Then a game of tag was proposed in which Belle was soon unable to play a part. But Wilton chased the fleet-footed little Winona until they were both shouting with laughter. At last she was caught, and stopped short, laughing and panting.

"Now," cried her captor breathlessly, "I shall give you eight kisses for your birthday!"—He had long since lost his first backwardness in this art, and proceeded to carry out his threat.

His victim, instead of showing signs of distress, rather

lent her glowing cheek to the caress, returning the "one for good measure" with a sound smack of her own rosy lips.

When they both dropped exhausted in the grass, a thin little voice sneered out to them :—

"I don't think, Winona, I'd always be kissing the boys. I should think you'd feel ashamed of yourself!"

"Well, I don't!" declared Winona hotly. "Why shouldn't I kiss Willie if I like? I always kissed Dr. Adam, and he didn't say it wasn't nice?"

"Well, mamma told papa last night that it made her positively disgusted to see you go round kissing people. She said it was all very well to say 'Winona de Monteano,' but the name didn't make the nature. And people never knew what to expect when they had a bastard to bring up."

Winona looked at Wilton in wonder, and edged away from him almost unconsciously.

Wilton dropped his eyelids in confusion. He had heard that word sneered behind his back, coupled with another term, "foundling." He was not clear as to the meaning of either, but he made up his mind, now, to know.

Winona was too young to ponder over it long. It was one of the mean things in the category of abuses that she seemed called upon to bear, but the innocent charm of the boy-and-girl friendship was broken. She cried herself to sleep that night, longing with all her sore little heart for Adam.

Wilton waited about anxiously at bedtime to see Grandpa Bearall alone. At last his chance came, and slipping to his good friend's side, he laid his boyish hand on the rough coat sleeve and, with downcast eyes, asked softly :—

"Grandpa, what is a bastard?"

"Why, why! Bless my soul, child!" Isaac said nervously

plucking the glasses off his nose and rubbing them vigorously. "A bastard is, well,—a poor child that ain't got no proper father and mother! But look a-here sonny, you don't want to do no worryin' about that pedigree o' yours. That 'er pedigree is all right an' sound, I'll bet my bottom dollar."

"Weren't Mr. and Mrs. de Monteano proper parents, grandpa," asked the boy, still unsatisfied.

"Well, I should say they was, son, for all I know about 'em, though they did have a mighty mean name to give a Christian child. But what's the matter with you, anyhow bubby? Has anybody been sayin' anythin' mean to you? 'Cause if they have, they've got your grandpop to deal with."

"No, sir," replied Wilton, "no one has said anything about me lately. Good-night, grandpa!"

"Wait a minute, sonny!" Isaac called after him. "I've got somethin' to tell you." "Grandma found that there ten-dollar bill this afternoon. I reckoned I better tell you, so she wouldn't have to. She found it tucked into an old waterfall in the top drawer. She'd clean forgot she'd put it there. I always told her she'd find it in some outlandish place, and sure 'nough she did. Now you can go to bed and sleep easy. An' I don't want to hear nothin' more about that pedigree."

Wilton went to bed with a light heart. The good news of the recovered ten dollars for the time almost crowded the trouble of the afternoon out of his mind. But the horrid word applied to his beautiful little Nona never ceased to rankle in his memory.

When the green burrs were first bursting on the ragged limbs of the old chestnut trees, Mrs. Stillwater and her

family went home. It had been a happy summer, and Winona's eyes were dropping tears that would not be winked back as the house faded out of sight.

"Don't cry your tears on me?" fretted Belle, as a warm drop splashed on her bony little hand.

The mother, giving Winona a severe glance, drew her child carefully out of reach of the drops.

As the wagon glided over the top of the hill and out of sight, Wilton rushed to his little narrow bedroom, and, throwing himself face downward upon the bed, indulged in a passionate burst of tears.

Father Bearall drew himself up to his full height, with a sigh of relief saying :—

"Well!" that little Winona is as chipper and bright a little thing as ever I seen, but when them other two went out o' the house, I kind o' felt as if a raw foggy day had lifted up out o' the way an' let the sun shine."

"She's powerful religious though," said grandma, "and religion makes up for a good many things."

"Mebbe it does, 'Mother,' mebbe it does!" said Father Bearall.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE will now pass over a period of ten years, which brings the scenes of our story to the spring of 1883.

Children change so amazingly in a short lapse of years that we almost dread to go back to Wilton and Winona, lest they seem like strangers; lest the sight of the change make our hearts turn wistfully back, to sigh over the ever-fleeting days, which we can never really grasp as they pass by.

But these friends of ours are not all children, and we turn expectantly to Dr. Links, whom we also deserted when with a full heart he parted from his little companion at her guardian's door. What have these ten years done for Adam,—Adam the yielding, the self-reproachful, the cynical, the reckless, the marvelously tender man? Adam, where are you? What, not here! Not here in the modest little home where you entertained the child guest, who longed to be a woman, that she might come back to live with you—always? No, not here! A group of noisy children pour out of the wide door, swung suddenly open, and stand gazing curiously at the stranger's face, while a stout, stolid, matronly-looking woman points out and away, over the clustering houses, to a residence of nobler proportions and prouder aspect—none other than the villa, the former home of the De Monteanos.

Looks of surprise have no meaning for the heavy-eyed former, or for her healthy, restless brood. "Dr. Links lives yonder at the villa;"—and with that the door closes.

Times have, indeed, looked up for Adam Links. Saint Augustine is fast becoming the fad, the craze, and during the winter months, the city throngs with wealthy visitors. Alas for themselves, many cannot leave behind them the imps of dread disease that dog their anxious footsteps, but they all hurry hopefully South, expecting to deposit their burdens at the feet of the now famous Dr. Links. And Adam has grown rich. Why has he bought that house which must be filled with associations anything but cheerful? Do not ask. We have long given up seeking to know the why of this strange, reserved, unaccountable man, who sprang apparently from nowhere, and has traveled, thus far, so persistently alone.

There is not an elaborate domestic arrangement at the commodious house. Of course all the town wondered what Dr. Links wanted of such a mansion as that, when he kept the most of it shut up, and only took with him that ridiculous old colored servant, who had done duty as man-of-all-work in the humbler home. But Adam was not the man to be easily approached on matters pertaining to his own business, so all this talk only made subject for neighborly gossip during the summer season when topics of popular interest were scarce.

It must not be supposed that there were no covetous eyes directed toward the beautiful villa, and its now interesting owner. Not a few mothers of fair daughters were there, who would have considered it a fair exchange, and no robbery, to have supplied a mistress for the home, in return for the privileges of the home itself; and Saint Augustine society told itself that it had always seen something promising and distinguished in the blunt manner and reserved bearing of the soldier doctor. Somewhere from the distant north, a

whisper had come floating mysteriously down, as such things do, that Adam Links had been nothing but a street waif, picked up and educated by a rich man ; but of late years St. Augustine had scouted the idea, and there was a much more authentic impression now afloat, that the distinguished Dr. Links bore rather haughtily the name and traditions of a proud and wealthy family, the privilege of whose escutcheon it was desirable to win.

However, Adam's reserve was impenetrable. He was deaf and blind alike to sighs and smiles. He had few friends, and no intimates. He was still noted for his uncompromising bluntness of manner ; but the old harsh, cynical sting, seldom now accompanied his words. The town cherished a great respect for the silent man, who worked so hard over his patients, and asked so little gratitude and attention in return.

The spring of 1883 had been a busy one ; but the winter visitors were now rapidly decreasing, and the usual respite from unceasing toil had come.

Adam sat alone in his study. The walls were lined with endless tiers of books, for books were the doctor's one extravagance. The same thick, professional volumes, that, in their dusty ill-humor, greeted him on his return from the old farm, still held a prominent place upon the shelves. They seemed, however, no longer to harbor contempt, but rather offered themselves with modest anxiety to the contemplation of his ripened wisdom and practical experience ; for professional books, like professional brethren, never meet the new aspirant half way. The windows of the library were long and wide, but well shaded from the afternoon sun by the portico, in the shelter of which De Monteano had loved to pass the peaceful hours of his last days.

Adam sat before a long study table of massive oak. He

had pushed his books away from him as far as his arm could reach, and sat motionless with his forehead resting upon his hand. Pen and paper lay before him, but for a long time he touched neither, he only sat there silent and absorbed till the very stillness became oppressive. Then, as if actuated by the vivid impulses of his revery, he suddenly arose, and walked straight over to the high mirror that paneled the back of the carved oaken mantel. The glass came just on a level with his face, and he stopped calmly before it, and contemplated the visage that gazed coldly and unshrinkingly back at him. Ten years had changed that face too. It was not quite the face, that, upturned from little Winona's breast, had received the baptism of her childish tears. The enigmatical mouth was hidden by a full dark mustache ; the chin was covered with a close, rather pointed beard ; and the abundant black hair was streaked with gray at the temples and above the brow. Taking it all together, it was a fine face. The nose was handsome, the forehead broad and distinctively perceptive, while the eyes, once slightly at variance, by long companionship and like interests had become really matched at last, just as a well-mated couple, after years of intimate association, present to their surprised friends a curious likeness of physical features, as well as mental characteristics.

But Adam did not seem pleased with the reflection. His brow slowly darkened and he leaned forward and thrust his hands through the hair at his temples. As the locks stood imprisoned between his fingers the ends showed unmistakably white, and his nearness to the uncompromising mirror brought into full prominence the settled life lines of his face.

He pushed back the offending locks with a gesture of im-

patience, and turning sharply, sent the vision scowling back into obscurity. For a long time he stood leaning against the mantel in a dejected attitude and with downcast face ; then, with a deep-drawn sigh roused himself and went back to his seat before the long table. He picked up his pen and adjusted the paper, but even then he paused, undecided, dropped his chin into his hand and allowed his thoughts to wander again.

After another long silence he came back abruptly to his purpose, and, seizing his pen began to write.

“ MY DEAR WINONA :

“ Once more I am moved to write to you, though, if my unchanging heart could believe it, I should know that you had forgotten me long ago. Have you never thought of your old friend, Winona, that you have so persistently neglected to answer my letters all these years ? I know that you are alive and well, for I hear of Mr. Stillwater and his family, sometimes, through our winter visitors. You will be seventeen years old in August. Yes, I can believe it, for you have grown up in my heart, Winona. You have been so constantly in my thoughts that I have marked the changes almost as though you were before my eyes. I think of you now with your golden curls drawn together into a sunny coil low at the back of your head ; with your white arms and neck, that peeped so plump from your low-necked, puffed-sleeved dresses, hidden away in your grown-up gown, which perhaps almost touches the floor about your feet. If you should appear to me in your tall, slender, girlish loveliness, you would not astonish me as much as you think, for I have kept pace with you all these years, and know you almost as you are. So truly so, that I can refrain, with all due con-

sciousness of the impropriety, from calling you as of old, 'My dear little Winny! my playfellow! my little comrade!—the child friend,' who once wept, in the innocence of her heart, because she could not stay to live with me always; and now has long since left me with nothing but her never-fading memory to bind me to herself. What does it all mean, Winona? Oh, the worlds I would give for an answer to that question!—But my pride will not let me seek you for a personal reply and a possible repulse. I would rather live alone with your sweet memory. Alone in this big house where you were rocked in your mother's arms, and lay softly asleep on your dying father's breast. There are other memories here than those of you, Winona, and though some of them are both sad and hopeless beyond retrieval, I prefer to dwell among them since they are the most living things in my singularly barren life,

"You are seventeen, Winona, and will soon come into the enjoyment of your large property, and the freedom and joy of the spring-time of your life; while I—I am passing into the full noonday; my hair is streaked with gray and my face with lines of care and long struggle with fate. Life rests more heavily on my heart than on yours Winona, but nothing can deaden it to the long ache of your silence. Once more I wait in anxious hope.

"As ever yours.

"ADAM."

Adam was no self-worshiper weeping over the touching picture of his own sorrows. He wrote this letter firmly and rapidly with no outward expression of the sadness in his heart. He then folded and sealed it with a steady hand, and holding it though another long spell of silence and motion-

less reverly, at last dropped it into his letter box. Then he drew out a little drawer at his left and took therefrom a package of letters carefully tied together. He untied them and took them up one by one. To Winona, May, 1874. To Winona, May, 1875. To Winona, May, 1876. There were nine of them; the last one bore the date, May, 1882. The envelopes were not thick, and though he contemplated silently and long the outside of each separate one, he did not open any of them, and finally laid them down in a close package beside him. Then he selected paper and envelope of like dimensions, and once more bent over his desk.

This time he wrote feverishly, and his breath came hard and fast as though distressed by the violent beating of his heart, but no other sign of his emotion escaped from him, and, presently, he folded and sealed this letter also, and directing the envelope "To Winona, May 1883," he placed it on top of the others and returned the whole package to the drawer.

Then he arose, and taking from his pocket a key, he unlocked the doors of a wide, flat cabinet that occupied the only space on the library wall left vacant by the book shelves.

The open doors exposed a strange collection for a man like Adam to make. There were placed in careful rows against the velvet-lined closet-back, photographs of little girls ranging in ages from about four to eight. Conspicuous among them were two or three rather poor little pictures of Winona, which he himself had had taken during the happy days of their unbroken friendship.

This bevy of happy faces smiled out at Adam as he flung open the doors, and for the first time the solemn seriousness lifted from his face, and he almost smiled back in return.

What would the good people have thought if they could

have taken a peep into this, Dr. Links' silent sanctuary? They would have exclaimed at the doctor's last and strangest oddity, and wondered why he should make a collection of children's pictures when he took no special notice of the children themselves. But the good mammas who could not force their incomparable offspring upon the reserved doctor's attention knew not how many little maidens, playing out of sight of maternal solicitude, received the cold doctor's passing smile of yearning sympathy and goodfellowship.

Yes, perhaps Dr. Links has changed most of all during these ten years we have passed over, for we do not recognize in this man of affluence and rejected social position, with his firm bearing and self-respecting, though blunt manner, the young man who, through the first twenty-two years of his life, was driven to innumerable "shady deeds" by the tyrannical will of a self-constituted guardian and benefactor.

CHAPTER XVII.

SILAS STILLWATER stood looking down morosely at the southern post-mark of a letter which he held in his hand. It was addressed to Winona. There had not been another one bearing that handwriting in the house for many a day. The Reverend Stillwater was perceptibly annoyed, though there was mingled with his displeasure a feeling of secret gratification that the letter had fallen into his hands, rather than into another's. It was well that Winona was out on a morning errand, for Silas was beginning to feel somewhat embarrassed in exercising the prerogative of his guardianship to the extent of first looking over his ward's letters.

However, this had been a necessary arrangement under the peculiar and secret misfortune of his stewardship, and thinking of his good fortune to have thus secured the letter, the hard-earned, sanctimonious lines of the reverend gentleman's mouth were suddenly twitched into no uncertain curves of secret self-gratulation.

With a covert glance about the room, which was safely devoid of any eye but the invisible One, to whose all-seeing majesty he weekly called the prayerful attention of his flock, he carefully broke the seal. It was, as he supposed, a letter from Dr. Adam Links. He read curiously till he came to the place where the writer referred to the property which was shortly to become Winona's unrestricted possession, then his sallow cheeks glowed a dull red, and he crumpled

the offending epistle angrily in his hand, and made as though he would throw it into the grate. But restrained in time by his unsatisfied curiosity, he unfolded it again and perused the few remaining lines with a half sneer on his face, after which he tore the crumpled pages into the minutest fragments.

Thus was Adam's heart-hunger the cause of yet one more dishonor in Silas Stillwater's guardianship. This was not the first letter from Dr. Links to Winona that he had destroyed, but he reflected with satisfaction that, judging from the contents, it was quite likely to be the last.

When Winona had first learned to read and write, she had dispatched sundry childish little notes to her beloved Dr. Adam; but as she grew older, the same thin, peevish voice that had sneered at the kisses bestowed upon her little playmate, Wilton, turned its venomous poison against the innocence and purity of this earlier attachment; and the wounds inflicted were carefully kept sensitive by the astute Mrs. Stillwater who, while shaping her daily conduct upon the strictest following of Old Testament law, nevertheless had forgotten "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."

So with many secret tears Winona had dropped the correspondence. She had received no answer to her last letter, and it was easy now for the sarcastic Belle to bring the hot blush of shame to her face under the taunt that she had wanted to keep up correspondence with a man who was the first to forget her.

There had been many hard days for the orphan girl during the years that followed the summer on the farm. Long familiarity with the fact of her dependence upon them had made the Stillwaters forget at times the shameful reason of

that dependence; while Winona's entire ignorance of the state of affairs, and her growing subservience under the stinging knowledge of her position, fostered both their independence and the unconcealed dislike of mother and daughter.

But there was another element in Winona's cup of bitterness which was worse than all the rest, worse, because it was so subtle, mysterious and inexplicable. Winona shrank from it, but she scarcely knew from what she shrank. She only felt to the last quivering nerve of her body, and to the very essence of her bones, the strange, mesmerizing, passionate glances of Dominie Stillwater's eyes,—glances which burned into her very soul every time she found herself alone with him. Many a time her very flesh crept, and she was about to hasten trembling from the room, when the sudden appearance of wife or daughter would change the uncanny atmosphere in the twinkling of an eye, and would leave her still trembling, but ready to die of shame for her foolish imaginings.

However, reason would not put down her fears, and to flee from his approach whenever possible became her instinctive impulse. Unfortunately she did not escape by mere flight, for she saw that her very fears only sharpened her tormentor's unmistakable attempts to cut off such retreat. Then a new and mysterious humiliation presented itself. The strange unwarned appearances of Mrs. Stillwater, invading with cat-like tread, and at all hours, the privacy of her room, as though keeping her under secret surveillance, caused the young girl a perfect agony of unmerited humiliation and shame. She dared not speak of this strange impression to any one, or, daring, would not have known how to put such unshaped thoughts in words.

So, Winona, just budding into young womanhood, was glad of the school, of the church, of anything to draw her safely out of the uncongenial home. She was a very apt scholar and enjoyed, to the depths of her starved young heart, the love bestowed upon her by teachers and companions.

There had never been anything congenial between herself and her guardian's daughter, Belle. This young lady was growing up to be a fac-simile of her mother, and already showed signs of possessing some of that lady's cold, bloodless beauty; but, unfortunately, she had not yet developed the stern morality that made the mother's character one to respect, if not to love.

Belle was very clever, and the shafts from her brilliant, though caustic tongue, were the dread of her slower-minded and always generous-hearted companion. Belle felt, even before she was thoroughly enlightened, that Winona's presence in the house was nothing less than short-sighted charity on the part of her parents, and a sort of injustice to herself as well. For Silas Stillwater's talents were not of a conspicuous order and brought him no overflowing measure of worldly prosperity.

When Belle was sixteen years old, her mother had deemed it both prudent and advisable to acquaint her with the secret which the De Monteanos had earnestly stipulated should never be made known to Winona. It had been the dying man's last direction that the child should never be told she had other parents than the foster father and mother who loved her so well.

Mrs. Stillwater would not herself have betrayed to Winona the secret of her birth; but she considered it due to Belle that her parents should not hold such important knowledge

away from her. Consequently, she told her all, solemnly binding her to silence.

But the burning secret could not long be kept in Belle's cold breast, and she was soon piercing Winona's heart with vague and sarcastic hints of her illegitimacy. Winona's anger was one day aroused beyond the bounds of prudence and control. To dare to thrust these wicked, lying taunts between her and the parents whose every association she revered was the last straw. She flew at Belle, and with cheeks livid and eyes flashing fire, dragged her forcibly to her mother's room. Reaching the door, she flung it open without even the scant ceremony of a knock. Mrs. Stillwater looked up in great displeasure, but her rebuke was forgotten in amazement at the picture of Winona's blind, panting wrath, and Belle's pale, sullen anger.

"What does this mean!" she asked sternly, rising from her chair. "Winona, how dare——"

But her words were cut short by the torrent of Winona's choked utterances;—"Tell her to take it back! Make her take it back!" she cried passionately. "I cannot, I will not bear it!"

"Belle, what does this mean?" demanded the mother again, when she could control her indignation sufficiently to find voice.

But Belle did not reply, and her pale lips curved into an expression of cutting scorn as she wrenched her arm free from Winona's vice-like clasp.

"Answer! answer!" cried Winona trembling, from head to foot with wrath and excitement. "Tell your mother how you dared to try and steal from me the only thing I have on earth,—my parents' honorable name. Tell her how you dared to call me a bastard, to hint that I was illegitimate! Tell her, I say! Tell her!"

But Belle did not open her lips and still regarded her victim with that fixed, insulting smile.

Mrs. Stillwater, with a peremptory gesture, motioned her daughter to leave the room. Belle turned on her heel, as though glad to obey, and glided out, closing the door behind her with slow care.

Winona was left alone with the cold, calm presence best calculated to bring her to herself. After a moment's withstanding of the steady, hard gaze, the blood fled from her cheeks and she dropped weak and faint into the nearest chair.

"Now," began Mrs. Stillwater in frigid tones which seemed to Winona's half swooning senses to be coming slowly to her from some far-distant room. "Now, if your vulgar passion has sufficiently cooled to allow you to listen to reason, I will explain this matter to you as quickly as possible. Belle has told you nothing more nor less than the absolute truth when she said that Leon de Monteano and his wife were not your parents."

The cruelly blunt words half paralyzed Winona's comprehension and she looked up into the hard face appealingly, as if to shield herself from a second blow.

"It is due you to say that they never intended you to know that you were an illegitimate child and therefore gave you their name, with the injunction that your real parentage be kept secret," continued the unsympathetic voice in calm, measured words.

"No, no, no!" wailed Winona in low, pitiful tones. "It is not true! Say it is not true!" she pleaded in a half whisper, pressing her cold hands against her throbbing heart.

"I have just said that it is true, Winona. I beg you to use your common sense in the matter and not throw yourself

into the paroxysms of an actress. It was wrong of Belle to tell you the secret in the way she did, and especially in violation of both my strict command, and her promise; but I never concurred in the wisdom of the arrangement and I believe it is for your best good that at last you know the truth. You may go to your room now, and I hope I shall never again witness such a shameful exhibition of blind rage as you displayed this afternoon."

Winona rose weakly to her feet and turned to the door. On the threshold she paused and opened her white lips to speak, but no words came. She gave a little gasping moan, turned, and crept falteringly to her room. Entering, she for the first time in her life, and in direct disobedience to all commands, deliberately turned the key in the lock.

For a long time she lay prone upon her bed. She did not sob or moan. She was too exhausted for that. Besides, her senses were dull and stupefied. She could not really feel the crushing blow that had come upon her, though she endeavored in a dim anxious way to realize it. Every time she tried to think of this strange awful thing, that deprived her even of a rightful name, her confused thoughts would branch curiously off to some light, half-forgotten memory like the shrill, weird, monotonous plaint of the peepers in the spring pond at the Bearall farm.

After a while, she began to remember a hundred little insinuations, and carelessly dropped words, which ought to have prepared her for this, but which had utterly failed to reach her inner consciousness, so secure in its unsuspecting confidence. Especially vivid came back that recollection of Belle's sneering words which had destroyed her childish freedom with Wilton, but which, until now, had carried no deeper meaning to her mind. Alas! what had she done that

she should have neither father nor mother in this cold world, that Adam had forgotten her, and that she was even dependent for daily bread upon this family who both despised and hated her. At thought of Adam, the hot tears began to flow. She conjured up out of the depths of her memory those wonderful love-lights that had beamed upon her from Adam's gray eyes—the only love-lights that she had ever known, save those she dreamed must have shone from the faces of the parents she had lost—Not her parents! Oh, how could she bear it!

As she pressed her cold hands together in despair at the thought, the plain band of gold Adam had given her pressed into her finger. She started to her feet and her face lighted up with the intensity of a sudden hope and wild desire. She would send this ring back to Adam! Had he not bidden her, with tears in his eyes, to send it back to him if ever she should need him? She sobbed convulsively with a blissful sense of protection and relief.

Drawing up a chair to her writing-desk, she dried hastily her swollen eyes, then, selecting a stout envelope, drew the ring from her finger and prepared to enclose it to her old friend. But suddenly she suspended her task and a dull red blazed all over her sensitive face. What, ask Adam's protection and renewed friendship, she, a bastard, an illegitimate child! Alas, she had not thought of that. Doubtless she would soon learn to keep it ever in mind! No, she would never appeal to Adam now! She would die first. She snatched the little ring and pushed it out of sight into the farthest corner of the desk. She would never wear it again, she said to herself, with a choking sensation in her throat. Adam had always thought her a true De Monteano. That she was sure of. What would he think of her now if

he knew she was a——No, it was too much! She could never hold up her head again!

As she sat there, crushed and utterly forlorn, she tried to think of some means of taking care of herself. How could she ever again be dependent upon the bounty of these people who, in some inexplicable way, had become her guardians without having been provided with necessary means for her support. She need not look forward to coming into any property now. She had never dared to ask questions pertaining to the financial part of Mr. Stillwater's trust, but she had vaguely expected that it would all come out right when she came of age. Her guardian's excessive parsimony in providing for her she had attributed to a natural closeness even in the spending of other people's money, or, perhaps, to Mrs. Stillwater's hatred of worldly luxury in any form. It was all explained now. No wonder they treated her with contempt. She was not only a bastard but a dependant.

As she sat vacantly gazing at the door opposite her, she saw the knob turn slowly and silently, while the panels gave a sudden creak as from a gentle push. Then the knob turned less cautiously, and finally with impatience. Winona's heart gave a little exultant throb to think that, for once, she was locked away from that gliding, prying presence. But the well-known voice quickly frightened away the unusual flash of rebellion as it exclaimed in half-stifled anger,—“Open this door instantly, you disobedient girl! What do you mean by locking yourself in, in this way?”

Winona rose reluctantly and turned the key. Mrs. Stillwater quickly flung the door wide open. Winona stood in the entrance, as though to receive her message there, and bar the passage into her retreat. But the undaunted lady waved her aside with an imperative gesture and swept unin-

vited into the room. She glanced, with what seemed to Winona an insolent air, carefully all about her, then, walking to the desk which her ward had just quitted, she also minutely inspected that with a ferreting gaze of her keen eye; afterward, taking from her pocket a letter, she laid it without a word upon the desk, only stopping to turn it carefully over and examine with cool scrutiny every mark which it bore. Then with a keen, half sneering glance at her ward's swollen features she swept in silence from the room.

Winona trembled as she again closed the door, so intense was her suffering in the presence of this merciless woman. She walked mechanically to the desk and, picking up the letter, listlessly tore it open, then drawing it out of the envelope turned it over to inspect the signature. It was signed "Wilton Bearall."

A warm glow of pleasure spread over her benumbed heart as she read the name. She had never heard from her little play-mate since she left the farm that beautiful morning in the early autumn.

The letter ran—

"DEAR WINONA :—

"I trust you will still let me call you by that name, since I cannot seem to think of you by any other.

"I have never forgotten the very pleasant summer hours we spent together on Grandfather Bearall's farm, though doubtless you, in your busy city life, have long since lost the memory of it. I saw you Sunday at church, you and Belle. I should scarcely have known you except that you were with Mrs. Stillwater, who has changed very little. You perhaps remember that grandfather's daughter, whom I have been taught to call Aunt Milly, used to be a member of Mr. Still-

water's congregation. She moved away from your vicinity about the time you returned from the farm. I have lately come to the city to enter a lawyer's office, and am at present fortunate enough to be a member of Aunt Milly's household. Last Sunday we went together to hunt you up. This, I trust, explains how I came to be in Mr. Stillwater's church, and how I came to have the pleasure of seeing you again—all of you—even though only across the church. Somehow I hesitated, after the service, to press myself upon your remembrance, but, thinking it over, I have ventured to hope that I might ask permission to call and renew the acquaintance I have always remembered with so much pleasure.

“Very respectfully yours,

“WILTON BEARALL.”

If Winona had received Wilton's letter a day or two previous to this one so fraught with shame and misery, it would have given her keen pleasure; for she had no more forgotten her summer on the old farm, and her handsome, little playmate, than had he. But her heart was too heavy and sad under its recent sorrows to feel more than a passing glow of pleasure.

She sat for a long time holding the letter, thinking of her new humiliation, and dreading to meet this old friend who was now a young man seeking his fortune in the great city where she too must struggle for a place; she, with no kind Aunt Milly or devoted Grandfather Bearall, to invite a return to their sheltering homes.

At last, completely worn out with grief, she dropped her head upon her arms and fell into a deep sleep.

When Winona left Mrs. Stillwater's room in obedience to

her stern dismissal, it must be confessed that she left that lady in a relieved frame of mind. The secret was out,—out, without being directly traceable to her as the violator of a trust. She easily quieted any conscientious scruples on the subject by assuring herself that in telling Belle she had acted from motives of parental duty and responsibility. For the unexpected outcome of this confidence, she could not justly hold herself responsible. Now that Winona knew the truth of her parentage, that awful question of property, which time was pressing so close, would, in all probability, never need to come up. Winona would not expect to fall heiress to De Monteano's property, now that she had discovered her real relation to him ; and it was easy to say, should the question ever come up, what was no more than the real truth, viz., that the bulk of the De Monteano property had reverted, by the provisions of a former will, to the male members of the direct family line, still subjects of Spain.

It must not be supposed that, after these reflections, Mrs. Stillwater dismissed from her mind with complaisance the subject of the dishonored trust. She had accepted the disgraceful facts as inevitable, but in her cold, hard way she suffered under them. ' If she could have realized her ideal happiness in this world, it would not have consisted in living, surrounded by love, friends, sympathy and material prosperity, but in looking back over a clear list of daily duties performed, and a clean record of the 'Ten Commandments kept. This was her highest conception of life, and if her time had fallen on the days of the Exodus, she would doubtless have stood as a type of godly womanhood ; but having appeared in the new era, she was like the young man who, having kept all the commandments from his youth up, yet lacked one thing. He could not sell all that he had to follow Him ;

the all being, in Mrs. Stillwater's case, the austere self-righteousness which clothed her like a garment.

When the lady had thoroughly reflected on this matter of property, she arose to perform a disagreeable duty. Belle was the real culprit in the matter, and she must be made to feel the enormity of her offence. The mother proceeded steadily to her duty, as was her custom. She found Belle in her own room, indifferently busying herself with a light piece of needlework.

It was almost a reflection of her own face that looked up at the mother as she entered and closed the door carefully after her. Mrs. Stillwater loved this child with about the only active love she felt for any one ; loved her as she loved herself, and it was a positive relief to speak sternly to her as to her own conscience.

"Belle," she began solemnly, "you have committed a very serious offense, the worse, since it is principally against yourself, and lies black on your conscience before God."

Belle made no reply, but continued to drag her needle in and out with perfunctory movement.

Her mother waited a moment, and then said sternly,—
"Have you no excuse to offer, no explanation to make of your dishonorable conduct?"

"None," replied Belle with cool steadiness, "except to say that what you told me in confidence was by no means new to me. I had heard enough dropped between you and father long before that, to have a pretty fair idea of the state of the case. Winona would have known it too if she were not so dull to see anything disagreeable about herself," she added spitefully.

"But that does not excuse your breaking a solemn promise

to me, to say nothing of concealing your conjectures from me when I talked with you on the subject."

"I did not say that it did, mother," replied the girl coolly. "In fact, I believe I just stated that I had no excuses to offer. Of course you are glad that the truth is out?"

This abrupt wording of her own hidden thought by the second self before her gave Mrs. Stillwater an unpleasant start. "Why do you ask that?" she demanded.

"Oh, merely because it is generally considered best to have the truth known," was the evasive reply.

Mrs. Stillwater found that she was being rapidly disarmed by her own methods of coolness and self-command. Gathering herself up for a final effort, she said sternly:—"You treat this very serious matter far too lightly. To give you time to think it over to your profit I desire you not to leave your room to-day or to-morrow. In the interval, devote yourself to your Bible."

Belle made a grimace as her mother closed the door, and said mockingly to herself:—"Devote myself to the Bible, eh! The Bible is always made a part of my punishment. No wonder I enjoy reading it so much." Nevertheless she reached over and took the dusty volume from its place on the table, then opened it at random. She smiled grimly as her eye fell upon the following words: "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretyship is sure." She drew a black mark on the margin beside the verse, and as she did so, her eye took in the following, only two verses above: "A talebearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter." She reddened a little over this last verse, but remarked precociously, "Never mind, I'm used to hearing other people pick out the verses that suit them best, and this first one suits

me. I intend to abide by the wise man's judgment in the matter of the stranger."

When Winona awoke her limbs felt heavy and her heart lay like a stone in her breast. But she arose stiffly from her chair, bathed her face, picked up her letter, and dragged herself slowly downstairs.

The family were just about to sit down to the tea-table. Mrs. Stillwater did not vouchsafe a glance in her direction, for which Winona was sincerely thankful. Belle was not present, and Winona was happily able to receive her guardian's searching scrutiny behind the curtain of her drooping eyelids. Every mouthful choked the heartsick girl. There were few attempts at conversation between her elders, and she welcomed the end of the meal with profound relief.

As she arose from the table, Winona without a word handed to Mrs. Stillwater the letter from Wilton.—She well knew what was expected of her. That lady took it complaisantly from the envelope and read it with care. Then she remarked severely:—"If Wilton were not a country boy and consequently not too wellbred, I should not excuse his writing to you and asking permission to call, instead of writing to your guardian or to myself. As it is, I suppose his *gaucherie* must be overlooked. You need not tell him to call before Friday." (Mrs. Stillwater did not intend that her daughter should be debarred from this pleasure also.)

As Winona was passing to her room that night she encountered her guardian in the yet unlighted hall. He seized her hand, drew her towards him and said, not unkindly, "I am your friend, Winona. You are foolish to avoid me." But Winona snatched her hand violently from his pressing clasp, and fled blindly up the dark stairs.

Her heart was bounding wildly as she nervously closed the door after her, and it was some time before even the shelter of her own room quieted her vague fears.

After awhile she dispatched rather a formal little note to Wilton. She could not do anything cordially to-night. She felt, in her humiliation, that she would like to hold herself aloof from all the world, lest anyone dare to deem her common.

She retired early; not indeed to sleep, but to be alone while she turned over and over in her throbbing head, that serious problem of how she could earn her own living and thus free herself from her crushing dependence upon the Stillwaters.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIDAY evening came, and both Winona and Belle waited in carefully concealed expectancy the arrival of their old acquaintance, Wilton Bearall.

The bell, ringing punctually at the appointed hour, was answered by the neat domestic, and Wilton was ushered into the parlor. We remember that Wilton was five years older than Winona and are therefore prepared for this tall, slender, erect young man who now presents himself as our former friend.

He has far less of *gaucherie* about him than Mrs. Stillwater evidently supposed. The wonder is, not that he carries himself so ill, but so well; and as we follow his movements, we are quite willing to join in Farmer Bearall's hearty prophesy, that Wilton's pedigree will come out all right.

His forehead is both broad and high, his glossy black hair still wavy and abundant; his eyes, always large and dark, now have in them the impetuous fire of young manhood; his well-shaped lips are half shaded by a youthful mustache, and his dark skin is as clear and pure as a child's.

The girls, with something like the natural coquetry which even Mrs. Stillwater could not quite starve out of them, kept him waiting what seemed to him a very long time.

At last, the door opened and Winona advanced to greet him. As his slender firm hand received hers in a cordial clasp, she felt a sudden thrill of pride that this handsome

young man was her old friend Wilton, and that he had remembered, with avowed pleasure, their summer hours together so long ago. She had to look up to him, he was so tall, and she blushed a little as his admiring glance met hers.

Adam had pictured Winona very well in that letter of his which the poor heartsick girl never received, except that, though slender, she was not tall. Her fluffy curls were drawn back on her neck as her old friend had imagined, but they were darker and richer than they would have been, perhaps, had they never known Mrs. Stillwater's scissors. Her eyes were large and blue under straight brows, and her lips met in the beautiful curves of a refined, sensitive nature.

"You look much the same, only not quite so full of fun," said Wilton smiling and disclosing a white row of strong, perfect teeth. "And this is Belle," he said cordially, as he stepped forward and returned the greeting which was evidently intended to be a quite grown-up bow, but which was finally extended to the courtesy of a handshake, under pressure of his own unaffected manner.

"You have changed more than Winona, I think," said he, after answering her rather prim inquiries concerning his health; "but then, I remember, you were ill when you came to B—— and I ought to expect you to look different. You are so much like your mother. I did not get a very good view of either you or Winona on Sunday, so pardon my comments."

Both girls were dressed very simply in white, but Belle had put a band of rose-pink ribbon about her throat which lighted up her usually pale features greatly to her advantage.

"You have changed most of all," said Winona, "I can hardly believe it is really you. But tell us, please, how are dear old Grandpa Bearall, and Mrs. Bearall, and the cows and horses and chickens? Do you know we have not spent

the summer on a farm since that delightful one ten years ago."

"Oh, how much you have missed!" exclaimed the young man regretfully. "I used to think that I was wasting time while I lived there, that I ought to be off to the city studying for a profession, or earning my living, like other boys I knew; but since I have been away and have seen a little more of life, I am thankful for every day I spent there, and I've never heard anything from the pulpit that was half the sermon that Grandpa Bearall preaches by his everyday life."

"But you haven't told us how Mr. and Mrs. Bearall are," interposed Belle, who was so methodical that she never skipped anything, not even an idea.

"I beg your pardon," said Wilton. "The last letter I received they were both in good health, though both are growing old fast. The cows, and the horses, and the chickens, which are now there, are all in the same sleek, prime condition they always show,—but you know that ten years make a great difference in those things."

"But you spoke a moment ago as if you had been a long time away," said Winona. "I thought by your letter that you had just come to New York."

"I have only recently come to New York," returned Wilton, "but I was in N—— at school for three years, and then two years there in a lawyer's office. I have worked hard, and have at last been admitted to the bar," he added modestly.

"How satisfying it must be, to be a man and have one's life-work all laid out to follow," sighed Winona as she thought sadly of her feeble, and still fruitless, attempts to achieve independence.

Wilton looked at her with some surprise but answered

laughingly :—"It is easier to choose a vocation in life, than to achieve success in it, as we all find out sooner or later. After all, do you think you would like the responsibility of being a man, having to choose for yourself, with all the dread liability of making an irretrievable mistake, with not only the responsibility of your own welfare on your shoulders, but also the greater one of helpless ones under your care?"

"Oh, no, Wilton, I think not, but neither is it pleasant to be one of the helpless ones with no one to take the responsibility and no preparation or vocation to fall back upon," said Winona from the depths of her sore heart, scarcely noticing how personal the words sounded.

Belle gave her a shrewd, side glance, and relieved her feelings with an affected little cough. Wilton looked surprised, but, thinking of her orphaned condition, followed the glance of surprise with a look of comprehending sympathy. Winona blushed as she reflected on the unintentional frankness of her words, but she was often driven to confusion by her unguarded impulses, and Wilton had already turned the conversation with kindly tact.

"I have never met your father, you know, Belle. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing both your father and mother to-night?" he asked.

"I think so," returned Belle, rising to seek her parents.

As the door closed behind her, Wilton turned to Winona, saying gently : "I have not forgotten all you told me about your life, Winona. It is hard to be without both father and mother ; harder still, to know not even their names, as bitter experience has taught me."

"And me," returned Winona in a choked voice. "I have learned many hard things since I saw you, Wilton. I, too, am more than an orphan, and worse than a waif."

Wilton gave her a quick look of doubting amazement, then that scene under the pear-tree, and the words which he could never either understand or forget, flashed quickly into his mind, and his fine expressive face glowed with a sudden protective sympathy.

Startled at her own boldness, Winona was glad that the entrance of the Stillwater trio precluded the possibility of a reply.

The minister and his wife greeted the young man with as much cordiality as it was in their natures to show, but Wilton found it hard to look at Belle again without a feeling of aversion, as he thought of the old bitter speech to Winona, and the still more cruel ones which her thin lips looked so capable of framing.

The young man did not stay late. As he parted from the different members of the family, he did not know that a message from his manly, sympathetic heart reached Winona through his fingers. All the way home he chafed at the impotence of the schemes he devised for showing her his sympathy. But Winona knew, how she could scarcely tell, that a warming ray had stolen into her heart, knew that if father and mother were lost to her, name denied her, friend cold and forgetful of her; she still had one friend who had never forgotten her,—the playmate of her happy, childish summer, an orphan like herself, nameless like herself.

She crept into bed dreaming of a tall, protective presence, a manly but gentle voice, and the sympathetic glances of a pair of fine dark eyes.

There was also another who carried a new image into her dreams, none other than the cold, studiously decorous, unimaginative Belle.

Winona went about her duties next morning with renewed

cheerfulness. She was naturally of a very sunny disposition so that comparatively small joys were capable of restoring her drooping spirits. It was no small joy to feel the near presence of a friend, in her heretofore friendless state ; besides that, she had been promised a position as teacher in the public school, so soon as she had passed her eighteenth birthday. That time was not now far distant, so she resolved to bear patiently her dependence for a little while longer and trust to a brighter future.

Wilton let no more time lapse than was covered by the narrowest limit of propriety before he made his second call. Though very neat, the young man had never been over fastidious about his dress. However, on the night of his second call, none of the simple appurtenances of his toilet seemed capable of suiting his critical fancy.

He tried on ties of various colors before he decided to wear one with a white ground and dark polka dot, while the smudge of ink deep-dyed into the tip of his middle finger and under the glossy nail, gave him unlimited annoyance. He thought he had never seen anything that looked so fresh, so dainty, and so sweet as the white-gowned, golden-haired Winona when she met him half shyly, yet so cordially, at the parlor door. He felt that nothing in his stiff, graceless man's dress could be made a proper compliment for her eminently fit attire. He was very grateful for Aunt Milly's kindly flattering comments on his appearance, as she looked up into his face with a roguish twinkle in her eye and asked him where he was going. He could not for the life of him tell why he needed to blush like a great schoolboy as he answered that he was going to spend the evening with the Stillwaters ; but he felt the blood rush into his face, while Aunt Milly, with never-wanting tact, took his hot cheeks

between her soft palms and saluted him with motherly tenderness on the lips.

"I couldn't think more of you if you were my own boy," she said warmly and with tears in her eyes. "I certainly think the good Father sent you into my life, before he took my own little ones, to help me out. Bless your dear, pure, noble heart! I just felt that you belonged to me, in some way, when you first ran headlong into my arms."

"How can I ever thank you enough for that kind thought," said the young man, gratefully, covering with his warm palm the plump little hand she laid on his shoulder. "Where should I have been now, but for you?"

"All things work together for good, you know, Wilton," replied Aunt Milly cheerfully, "and a trusting spirit makes the world go smooth in spite of the dark and devious paths. Now run along; I don't want to keep you from the Stillwaters," she added with a mischievous glance. "You enjoy Dominie Stillwater's conversation, do you not?—and Mrs. Stillwater's words certainly weigh, if they do not sparkle."

"They ought to sparkle, for their temperature is always cold enough to make ice," laughed Wilton as he kissed his kind patroness good-bye and proceeded happily on his way.

When he arrived at the Stillwaters', he asked dutifully for the young ladies, devoutly wishing that Belle might chance to be out, or, if worse need be, debarred from seeing him by some slight indisposition. But this young lady was the first to make her appearance, and Wilton manfully repressed his feeling of disappointment.

Belle was, for her, in an engaging mood to-night, and her clever and ready tongue soon had Wilton busily occupied in discussions, and answering questions. She had read a great deal and was not averse to showing her knowledge of books

and authors; and her comments were both shrewd and precocious. For some reason their conversation branched off on theological questions, and Wilton was amazed at some of the biting sarcasms hurled at the professors of her father's creed.

Nearly a half hour passed in this way, and Wilton was growing uneasy. Seizing the first opportunity in the conversation, he inquired for Winona.

"Oh!" said Belle, as though the matter had been of such slight consequence to her that she had forgotten to make the explanation, "Winona is in a fit of the dumps to-night, I believe. She has become quite afflicted of late with spells of that malady. That is the way with people who seem to have these cheerful, buoyant dispositions; they are either way up or way down. Winona seems lately to have frequent relapses of the way-down periods."

"I am very sorry," replied Wilton, condoningly. "Winona never seemed to me like a person who would indulge in fits of depression without great provocation. Perhaps she is not well?"

"Oh, she is quite well," declared Belle. "You remember the old saying, 'To know a person, one must live with him.'"

Wilton was deeply hurt at Belle's cruel disloyalty to her foster sister, but he made no further reply. He found it hard to keep up even the semblance of an interest in the conversation to which Belle returned, and, making an excuse for early departure soon took his leave.

He felt keenly the disappointment of not seeing Winona, but more he worried over what might be the cause of her refusal to see him, and his step home was slow and lagging. He went immediately to his room. As he passed Aunt

Milly's door, that kind, watchful friend murmured to herself, "What can be the matter with the boy, anyway!"

As for poor motherless Winona, she felt indeed that now the whole world was against her. What would, what could Wilton think of her!

What, indeed, would Wilton have thought had he known the true reason of the fit of depression to which Belle had been so glad to make reference.

Winona had been happy all day in expectation of seeing Wilton at night. Absorbed in the new warmth of heart that his first visit had left, she had since that visit been all but unconscious of the cold faces and contracted hearts of those surrounding her when at home.

Mrs. Stillwater and her daughter had gone out on a shopping expedition, her guardian was also out making a pastoral call. Winona sat alone in her room busily engaged in the fashioning of one of her own simple lace collars. There came a light knock at the door. "Come in," she called cheerfully, supposing it to be the maid with the week's freshly-ironed clothes, and scarcely looked up from her sewing. A tall, dark figure cast a shadow over her work, and she glanced up with a start. There, on the threshold stood her guardian, with an enigmatical smile on his lips and a strange, half-careless, half-apologetic expression on his face.

Winona's heart, began to beat loudly but she tried to control herself and asked tremblingly, "Did you want anything, sir? I did not hear you come back, and you quite startled me."

"I just came up to see what you were doing," replied Mr. Stillwater, trying to speak naturally. "You are out of the house so much now, I see very little of you," he continued suavely, closing the door behind him and moving a chair

close to Winona's side. "Ah! what have we here, one of the pretty little bits of lingerie that young ladies enjoy making so much?" he next asked, putting out his hand on pretext of examining her work, and taking possession, in an apparently absent-minded way, of her cold fingers.

"A collar, sir," replied Winona, drawing away her hand, and trying in vain to steady the voice which her bounding heart shook fluttering from her throat like the vibrations of a defective reed.

"Oh, a collar! And how do we wear it?" he queried, lifting the scarf and placing it about her neck, pressing it against the soft skin with his warm fingers in a movement meant to be caressing, but which seemed to the frightened girl like a menace to throttle her.

"It is not quite finished," she said, stifling a wild desire to call aloud to the maid, and drew the collar from her neck in order to rethread her needle.

"Never mind the needle. Do you never have trouble with your eyes from too close application?" asked the minister, drawing his chair still closer. Then placing two long fingers under her chin he turned her face to him and held it there while he regarded her with a strange expression that brought the hot blood into the girl's pale cheek.

She evaded the glance, and, with a desperate effort to throw off fear of him, said chokingly, "Why do you treat me in this strange manner, Mr. Stillwater?"

"Strange," echoed her tormentor passionately. "It is only strange because you will not believe how fond I am of you. How can I teach you better than this!" and he suddenly bent over her and clasping her in his arms pressed a long kiss upon her shrinking lips.

Winona tore herself from his embrace. "You shall not,"

she cried, trembling with indignation. "What can I think of an affection which only shows itself at times like these, sneaks in the darkness, and follows me when I am alone. I do not ask your affection, sir ; I only ask the justice at your hands which you have never dared to show. I may be helpless and alone in the world, but you shall, at least, respect me. I despise your avowed fondness and friendship !"

The words had scarcely left her lips before a complete change had come over the face and aspect of the man before her.

Drawing himself up to his full height he became, in the flash of an eye, once more the minister, her guardian, the arbitrator of her fortunes.

So sudden was the change, so complete the transformation that she stood before him dumb, helpless, stupefied, and overwhelmed with a feeling of shame and guilt, as though she had been the aggressor, had offered the first unwarranted insult.

"Remain in your room till I order you to leave it," he commanded in crushing tones of outraged dignity, and moved proudly from her presence.

The only reason for remaining in her room, that poor Winona dared plead to Mrs. Stillwater, was her own indisposition.

So Wilton came and went, disappointed and chagrined, while Winona bore her humiliation as best she could in solitude and silence.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FEW days after this, Winona received a second letter from Wilton. She did not quite know how she had put in the time following the last and worst of her humiliations. She was in a way oblivious to all about her, so much more intense were her inner emotions than any outside impression. She took the letter listlessly from the postman's hand and turned it over several times before opening it. How could a letter contain anything of great worth to her, when she must immediately share its contents with a woman like Mrs. Stillwater. It had not occurred to Winona that she could refuse to show her letters. Her sense of miserable dependence was too keen.

The letter was as follows :

"DEAR WINONA :—

"I trust you are not ill. It was a great disappointment to me that I did not see you Tuesday evening. I have tickets for a very fine lecture to be given in Chickering Hall. Will you accept my escort, and in company with Aunt Milly and her husband, embrace this opportunity to hear Dr. W—— on Egyptology? If I receive a favorable reply I will call for you at seven o'clock and bring you first to my aunt's house, where she will join us. Trusting that I may have the pleasure of your company and that we may enjoy this treat together.

"I am as ever,

"Your friend,

"WILTON."

Winona did not allow herself any vivid anticipation over this invitation, but placed the letter in silence before Mrs. Stillwater.

The minister's wife read it with a frown, and pressing her lips together in displeasure, said firmly,—“ I shall not allow you to go, Winona. You are barely eighteen years old, and with your peculiar and unfortunate family history to combat, I do not feel justified in allowing you to go out with young men, even as early as I otherwise might. You may write Wilton to the effect that you are not yet receiving invitations from young men.”

Winona's heart swelled with indignation at the implied insult, but she closed her lips tightly and turned away.

Just then Belle, who had been an interested and complaisant listener to this conversation, moved up to the table upon which her mother had laid the open letter and began to peruse the contents.

Winona noted this liberty with smothered wrath, and stepping quickly to her side laid her hand over the letter saying, with flashing eyes and hot cheeks,—“ Belle, I believe I am under no obligation to have my letters read by any other member of this family than my guardian; his wife I allow to read them out of courtesy, his daughter—never ! ”

Belle's lips curled in silent scorn. Mrs. Stillwater was white with anger at the unexpected assertion that she was *allowed* to read Winona's letters, through courtesy.

“ Winona,” she said sternly, rising to her full height and regarding her husband's ward with crushing severity, “ Winona, I have noticed of late a most lamentable tendency to show insolence both to myself and Belle. Let me assure you once and for all that no such tendencies will be allowed

to develop here. Let this be the first and last time that I ever hear such an answer fall from your lips."

But things had gone too far. Winona was too filled with a long-pent-up sense of abuse and outrage to take much thought of consequences. So in a voice far calmer than she could herself explain, she said steadily:—

"I, too, have something to say to you, Mrs. Stillwater; that something is principally this: I will never again endure in silence a taunt or a sneer from either you or your daughter. "I have also a question to ask,—many questions in fact. I wish to know the provisions of Leon de Monteano's will in my behalf, and also to know why Mr. Stillwater is my guardian, if there has been provided no recompense for his services. I refuse longer to believe that you are keeping me here, even for one day, out of any feeling of charity or consideration of kindness."

Winona's clear blue eyes were looking straight and unflinchingly into Mrs. Stillwater's own, and in spite of all that lady could do, she felt her lids drop before the gaze. She grew white to the lips. Never in all her life had she felt so helpless and so completely foiled. She gave a quick glance in Belle's direction and caught the scornful smile which still lingered upon her lips and which now seemed to be directed toward herself. That smile on the face so like her own, seemed the biting scorn of her own better self, her whilom, stainless conscience.

These thoughts flashed through her mind like lightning; but the brief pause, and the haunted expression of her face had been full of import to the searching eyes confronting her. It was a desperate moment, and, gathering up her scattered senses, she repeated the old formula that had always done duty in stilling her own conscience, but which sounded

strangely lame and inadequate in this crisis. "The bulk of De Monteano's property went back, by the provisions of a former will, to the direct family line now in Spain."

Belle's smile of scorn changed to a positive sneer as her mother made this weak, evasive answer, and Mrs. Stillwater's pale eyes received it like a blow.

"If the bulk went to the direct family line, where did the remainder go? What provision did my foster father make for his adopted child?" persisted Winona.

"The remainder went into other bequests," replied Mrs. Stillwater, her lips livid and her voice faltering in pronouncing the words.

Winona still kept her searching gaze upon her, as though she would read her very soul, while a new comprehension dawned slowly in her own eyes, as though she had indeed read the guilty secret. Then saying steadily, "I shall accept Wilton's invitation for Friday evening, Mrs. Stillwater!" she walked quietly from the room.

Belle also left by another door, repeating softly, as though to herself,—*"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise."*

Mrs. Stillwater sat down. Never in all her life had she been stripped of her self-righteousness as in this hour. She shivered in her nakedness of soul and forthwith commenced to gather up the ragged garment.

"Why did I answer her at all? Why did I not send her at once to her guardian, and let him take the brunt of his own sins?" said Prudence.

"Because you knew that you were as guilty as he, and the knowledge paralyzed your forethought," answered Conscience.

"Why did I so weakly hesitate in declaring nothing but a

simple truth, and let her see the hesitation in my face?" persisted Prudence.

"Because you are not all false and bad; because you knew it was not the whole truth and you were ashamed to prevaricate with your daughter's eyes upon your face," replied Conscience.

"What could Belle have thought? What did she mean by quoting that proverb?" asked Self-respect anxiously.

"She meant that she would have shown more shrewdness in your place. Are you sure that daughter of yours is not a little deeper, and a little more versed in the wily ways of the world than you ever dreamed? She is a very strange girl, you know," interposed Maternal Solicitude.

Poor Mrs. Stillwater found it difficult to gather up the poor shreds of her tattered garment about her, and still shivered in this sudden, cruel exposure of her soul. She had a bitterer, more outraged feeling than ever against that husband of hers who had required all this sacrifice of personal godliness at her hands. And she stored up in her heart a new supply of icy thoughts, where never yet had there been any possibility of a thaw.

As for Winona, she walked out of the room as if in a dream. A hundred questions which had been suggested in that strange interview were clamoring for an answer. But, for the time, she could afford to give them little attention. She only knew that her heart felt light as air, that a great burden of shame and implacable inferiority had been lifted from her breast. Mrs. Stillwater had quailed before her eyes. Now indeed she knew there was something her guardians had concealed from her. She could even be content for a time in not knowing what it was, so great was her feeling of relief in this new sense of her freedom. How had

she dared to assert so boldly that she should accept Wilton's invitation? But she had asserted it, and she sat immediately down and wrote the letter, after which she dispatched it, lest some unforeseen event should rob her of the courage. She could scarcely wait for the day, so keen was her pleasure in the thought of an evening spent in the company of Wilton and his beloved Aunt Milly,—away from the cold prying eyes of Mrs. Stillwater and the sneering glances of her daughter. She would never show Mrs. Stillwater another letter. She should have something, at last, that was her own. She should never hesitate again to lock her bedroom door. No more days heavy with the sense of secret surprises and catlike watchfulness, no more nights of shivering fears and sickening apprehension. Winona walked on air.

When she met the family at the table again, she succeeded in doing so with an appearance as if nothing had happened. Mrs. Stillwater was very quiet and seemed glad to follow her cue, but Belle bestowed upon her a glance of so much vindictiveness that Winona, in spite of herself, shivered before it.

Wilton called at the appointed hour. There came to greet him such a happy, blithesome little figure that all his fears of a great change in merry, winsome Nona vanished.

As he passed up the street with her pretty hand on his arm, the young man's heart bounded with a strange pride and joy. He would not have supposed he did care so much for little Winona. What a charming, rollicking playmate she had always been, to be sure. How they had jumped off the haymow and tumbled in the hay together! He glanced at the dainty figure beside him and flushed.

But Winona was chatting along by his side, recalling all

the dear, jolly days. Every now and then a soft, bubbling peal of laughter escaped from her pretty lips, and Wilton was filled with ecstasy—all in honor of the old-day recollections, he told himself. He wondered at the great difference in her face and voice when she was not with the Stillwaters, then he reflected it had always been so.

He refrained from questioning her about her refusal to see him when he called, and Winona thanked him in her heart for the delicacy of his feeling. She could not tell what Belle might have said to him, and feared to be entangled in what might seem to be a falsehood.

They soon reached the door of Aunt Milly's home, and Winona was presented to just the plump, sweet, brown-eyed, soft-voiced little woman of her imagination. Then she met Aunt Milly's husband, whom the fond wife adored with two-fold solicitude since he had returned from the war with a stiff arm and a stray bullet somewhere in his shoulder.

This home was like a revelation to Winona. Here care and sorrow and death had entered, yet no secret sin had found its way. Love beamed from every face, contentment, peace and quiet happiness brooded like watchful spirits over all. The young girl felt that for the first time in her life she had entered a real home, a home that was in every way congenial to her own sunny temper and hopeful disposition.

Aunt Milly watched the sweet, expressive face of her young guest with motherly pleasure and tenderness, then looking over at handsome Wilton she nodded her wise little head to her husband behind their backs, and looked even more contented than ever.

It was in this happy frame of mind that they all started for the lecture.

From this time Winona's position in the Stillwater house-

hold was much improved. Not because she was treated by her elders with more consideration and kindness, but because she was severely let alone. Mrs. Stillwater spoke to her only when necessary. Mr. Stillwater carefully avoided her, and Belle, while she seemed to regard her with an inscrutable evil intent growing in her face, also shunned her presence.

Winona pondered much over what the secret which her guardians held might be, but she felt thoroughly convinced that she would never again be able to draw anything on the subject from Mrs. Stillwater. She realized that it had been only by the suddenness of her onslaught, which had thrown that lady off her guard, that she had thus obtained even a suspicion of a secret. To go to Mr. Stillwater himself and demand an explanation was entirely out of the question. In the first place, she feared him, she dared not place herself that much in his power; in the second place, she had no hope whatever that such an errand would be anything but fruitless. She must simply bide her time and wait for future developments. It came into her mind several times that Dr. Links might tell her more than anyone else of her family history, but her proud little heart could never get over that sting of his forgetfulness, nor that sensitive shrinking from disclosing the secret of her birth. After all it was unlikely that he could tell her of the financial arrangements of the De Monteano family when he had evidently been entirely ignorant of her proper relation to them.

It never occurred to Winona to suspect that Mrs. Stillwater had deliberately lied to her in announcing the facts of her merely formal relation to the De Monteanos and the illegitimacy of her birth. The minister's wife had not more firmly impressed upon her ward the coldness and hardness

of her nature, than she had her utter incapability of telling a downright lie. In the outward life of the household she had erected a frigid, uncompromising standard of right and wrong by which she ordered the daily words and acts of her narrow life, and from which Winona had never seen her deliberately swerve. So the unhappy facts, as they had been laid before her, she accepted as unquestionable. The secret, whatever it might be, she felt belonged to Mr. Stillwater, and was guarded by his wife through some sense of duty to him, made compatible to her law-abiding conscience.

The summer vacation over, Winona's present difficulties and galling embarrassments were greatly relieved by securing the promised place as teacher in the public school. She now became a boarder instead of a dependent in the Stillwater family, and her position was considerably improved, as well as her heart greatly lightened, by the change.

Aunt Milly, who, for some reason best known to herself had never cared to keep up the Stillwater acquaintance, now, since meeting Winona, made frequent calls, asking for the whole family, but devoting, perhaps too plainly, her special attentions to Winona. This injudicious favoritism developed in Mrs. Stillwater's jealous heart a positive intolerance. As the poor woman grew older the hard, formal laws of conduct she had laid out for herself proving, as they did, so inadequate and so unsatisfying in the face of this slimy trail of sin, wedlock was binding her to cover, became less and less powerful to root out or even control the baser elements of her nature. She realized this and smarted under the knowledge, yet she fell again and again, as all of us do fall, recovered only by a hopeful, warm-hearted, human love, of which she, sadly enough, knew nothing.

At first Wilton asked for both young ladies when he called,

and became alternately, or together, their escort, but before six months had rolled by, he did not hesitate to ask for Winona only, when he presented himself at the door. Once Mrs. Stillwater would have refused to let Winona see him alone, but since that memorable day when the indignant girl confronted her with the secret thoughts of her own soul, she had never found courage or power to re-establish the old rules.

This preference of Wilton's might have been swallowed up and forgotten in her now silent but labored efforts to promote her daughter's interests and popularity with her associates ; but she perceived with dismay that Belle suffered, on this account, keener pangs of jealousy than her own. When Wilton was in the house, Belle was feverishly irritable and distraught, starting when the door opened to receive him, listening with strained ears for his departure. She received her mother's too-manifest attempts at diversion with biting sarcasms or unfilial retorts, she refused point-blank all well-meant but often tactless efforts to afford her an excuse to make one of the company. She grew peevish, thin, and more gray in tone than ever. When Winona parted from Wilton at the door and joined the family with a happy face and preoccupied air, Mrs. Stillwater noted with anxiety the too unguarded looks of bitter hatred with which Belle followed her movements, while her own heart burned with an impatience she could scarcely control.

Matters were growing more and more serious, while Winona, happily engrossed in her secret thoughts, became daily more oblivious to her surroundings.

The family life also grew daily more unendurable for the three most interested in, and dependent upon it.

Winona, having accepted her estrangement as inevitable, was gradually learning to content herself and find happiness

in other interests. But these three, whose lives were bound together by the closest ties of interest and consanguinity, were far less happy than she.

Mrs. Stillwater loved her daughter with a constant and jealous love for which she received but indifferent return. While between the two though there might be the secret understanding of like natures, there was not the slightest bond of confidence and sympathetic companionship. Between husband and wife there had never been, since that exposure of the dishonored trust, more than the cold ties of duty and common interests. While between father and daughter the most formal relationship had long been established by mutual consent. Silas Stillwater had finally grown tired of picking up the gray, gliding little figure, only to have it slip stiffly from his knee at the very earliest opportunity, and she, who had never enjoyed the privilege of his lap, was glad to be relieved of the necessity of appearing to do so.

To add to the general discomfort, the head of the family was growing strangely moody. Often he refused altogether to appear at his meals, or pushed his plate testily away from him. He complained of nausea and ringing in his ears. He excused himself as often as possible to his callers. His body grew thin, his step lagging, and his skin lost its ruddy color and clung to his protruding cheek bones like yellow parchment.

His wife was assiduous in her concern that the most carefully prepared and tempting food should be placed before him, that he should have his medicine at the proper hours, that he should not be deprived, unnecessarily, of his rest; but no one ever saw her place a tender hand upon his brow, or draw the throbbing head down upon her breast. And what

are custards and jellies to a sick body, with never a resting place of love for a sick heart !

So a year passed away.

Wilton's visits had continued with steady regularity. Even had there been no strange, mystic undercurrent to draw these two closer, yet Wilton and Winona would have been happy together. Their minds and hearts met joyfully on common ground ; their warm, generous, frank natures found something always to reciprocate. That common misfortune of orphanage was always a bond of sympathy, and the hopes and plans of each found instant understanding and response in the other.

One day Wilton called, bringing an extra piece of news to impart to Winona's ears.

"I have just come from the Home for the Friendless on Thirtieth Street, Winona," he said, taking both her hands in greeting.

"And what did you there, charming Billy?" she asked playfully drawing one hand away and blushing a little.

"I did not go to seek a wife, Winona, but a mother," he replied a little sadly. "You know it was at that place Aunt Milly found me, and took pity on me,—bless her good soul !"

"So it was," said Winona, with sympathy. "Did you learn anything, Wilton?"

"Very little. Won't you take this seat?" he said, placing a low chair for her and seating himself opposite. "I have learned just one thing, if the information may be trusted,—my grandfather's name."

"Oh, Wilton, have you? I am sure that is a great deal," cried Winona excitedly.

"Not so much, I am sorry to say, when there is absolutely

no other information to go with it," replied the young man ruefully.

"But how did you learn that?" urged Winona. "I should be glad to know even that much of my story," she exclaimed impulsively.

"Why, what do you mean, Winona?" asked Wilton, surprised out of the interest in his own history.

"Oh, Wilton," exclaimed Winona confused. "Please don't ask me, but go on with your story."

"Nona," said he, venturing to use, for the first time the old pet name. Nona, you have often, in an unguarded moment, made little impulsive speeches like that, which have puzzled me very much. Have you not faith enough in me, do you not care enough for me to make me your confidant?" he asked, a slight tremble in his manly young voice. "I have felt, ever since I called here the first time, that there must be a deeper cause of grief in your orphanage than you have ever let me know."

"Oh, Wilton, don't ask me!" replied Winona, covering her flushed face for a moment with her trembling hands.

"Forgive me, then, I will not urge you," he replied a little sadly. "I had thought—I had hoped—pray pardon my seeming curiosity. Believe me, my desire to know was not prompted by that motive."

"You did not finish what you were saying," said Winona, looking timidly up at him as though in mute pardon for her apparent unkindness.

"No, about my grandfather—they say his name was, or is, Burbank."

"They say!" Who says?" asked Winona anxiously.

"I'll have to tell you all about it to make you understand," returned Wilton, plunging at once into the story. "I went to

the asylum this afternoon and had them look up the date of my removal from the institution and the number by which I was designated during the short time I was there. They keep, I learn, a very careful record of their inmates, and I found, in connection with the account of my entrance and my adoption by the Bearalls, the following entry which I copied."

Wilton took a little slip from his pocket and read:—

"May 3d, 1864.—There came to the asylum this afternoon an old woman who inquired particularly after this child. She proved to our satisfaction that this is the child for which she was looking. Not only her name, Polly Halsey, was the same as the woman from whom we took the child, but her face answers the description we have recorded, while her story of being sent to 'The Island' corresponds in every particular with our record.

"The only new fact we could glean in regard to the child, (which we had reason to believe was stolen) was that its grandfather's name was Burbank. Polly Halsey seemed far more anxious to get trace of the grandfather than of the child, while her denunciations of that unknown personage were both vulgar and severe.—Signed—A. C. S."

"How glad you must be to know even that," sighed Winona sympathetically. "You will never see a Burbank, now, without feeling that you might claim relationship with him. But was the Burbank on your father's or your mother's side, do you suppose?"

"Ah! if I only knew that, I might be able to have my rightful name," said the young man regretfully, "but that, I fear, I shall never know."

"What terrible things, these secrets are to have in one's life!" faltered Winona, oppressed with the burden of her

own, longing, yet fearing and ashamed to cast it at the feet of this young man whose good opinion she prized above all things else in the world.

"Yes, they're sad things to carry through life. I hope never to have one in my future, at least one for which I am in any way responsible. Even those that are held with the kindest motives, and from the praiseworthy attempt to shield some one's feelings, are sure to lead to all sorts of unexpected complications, and cause more pain in the end than they have ever prevented."

Wilton's words stirred a chord of fear in his listener's heart. Was she laying up further misery for herself by concealing her unhappy knowledge from this her only true friend? Could she, dare she tell him? After all, her shame might be no worse than his—but *she* was a woman.

She looked up anxiously in his face, her eyes half revealing the secret her lips hesitated to frame.

Wilton looked back inquiringly at her and then, seeing she did not speak, said gratefully:—

"Sometimes I have thought it was asking a great deal of you, Winona, to seek your friendship, with this black pall of my unknown parentage between us."

"Don't, Wilton, don't!" exclaimed Winona passionately. "Did I not tell you that I also was more than an orphan and worse than a waif!"

"Yes, you did say so, Winona, but you have never explained your words, and I have never been able to divine their meaning. If you could know how—how near all your interests are to me, how glad I should be to serve you, you could, you would trust me, Winona. Sometimes I have thought you suffered very much in this home of your guardian, suffered in a way I could not understand, but I dared

not press your confidence, nor ask the secret of the suffering which I so gladly would have shared!"

"Your sympathy has been a great blessing to me, Wilton, though you have not known all. I have suffered,—truly I have, but everything is brighter now. Oh, if I only knew the truth! if I only knew!" she cried tearfully, burying her face in her hands with a sudden sob.

Wilton trembled with the excess of his feelings. He longed to gather the little figure to his breast, and he seemed stifling with emotion; but there was something in his heart that made her seem more sacred than ever in her grief, and he only ventured to touch the bowed head with a reverential hand, while he asked brokenly, "Winona, cannot I help you to find out the truth? I would go to the ends of the earth to serve you."

"Thank you, Wilton," she said, raising her head and looking up gratefully at him through her tears. "Wilton," she continued bravely, after a moment's pause, "Leon de Monteano and his wife were not my parents. They gave me their name and kept the secret to spare me shame!"

"What shame, Nona?" he asked gently, trying hard to keep surprise out of his voice and control the beating of his heart.

"The shame of knowing that I was an illegitimate child," she replied, with a deep blush and downcast eyes.

"Poor Winona!" he said tenderly, after a short pause, "and who told you all this?"

"Belle, in her scornful taunts," replied Winona with a pitiful quivering of her sensitive lips.

"Oh, Winona!" was all he could say, as the hot blood of indignation rushed into his face. "How could she be such a little viper!"

"How could she be such a little viper!" was echoed to them from a distant corner of the room, while a grating, hysterical laugh burst upon their ears. "Since you were so engrossed with yourselves as not to notice a third occupant of the room, I thought I would not trouble myself to make known a viper's presence. 'How could she be such a little viper!' ha, ha, ha! Ah! thank the Lord there's deadly poison in a viper's sting,"—and Belle swept out of the room, turning to throw back upon Winona a glare of malignant hatred.

Wilton and Winona sat and looked at each other in a state of frozen consternation. Wilton was the first to recover himself, for he noticed with a pang which brought him quickly to his senses that Winona was trembling from head to foot. Rising and taking her hand, he said gently, "What have I done, Winona? Oh, I fear I have now made your life here unbearable indeed!"

"It is no fault of yours, Wilton," she replied, rising dizzily to her feet as though she would follow Belle and sue for pardon.

But Wilton restrained her. "No, Winona, you shall not go to her," he said firmly; "I, of course, shall ask her forgiveness, but you shall not sue for pardon. She will only insult you. Winona, I know not what may be in your heart for me. Would to God I did know what I yet fear to ask; but this one thing I must say before another sun goes down. You shall never want a protector while I live. Not another day shall pass till I have made all preparations to go South and find in St. Augustine some clue to all these miserable secrets. Sometimes I think it is all a base fabrication for your further torment in this cruel family. If it is, I shall drag their falsehoods from their dens to confront them."

Winona tried to thank him, to expostulate with him; but

she was sobbing convulsively, thoroughly shaken with excitement and apprehension. She only managed to say falteringly, "No, no, Mrs. Stillwater would not lie. It must be only too true."

But Wilton shook his head doubtfully and asked gently, "Do you know of any one to whom I might go for information?"

"Only my old friend, Dr. Links," she said. "Surely he would know, if any one, and he would speak the truth."

"Then good-bye, Winona, and keep a brave heart. When we meet again we shall have unravelled something of these miserable tales, please God. You will be glad to see me with my better news, Winona, glad to have me back! When we meet again—" and giving her one look of passionate hope and longing, he dropped his head upon her hands and was gone, leaving the thrill of a lover's kiss to quiver heartwards from her fingers.

CHAPTER XX.

On, on, over the glistening rails, sped Wilton, heart aflame with hope, senses giddy with the first ecstasies of love ; love not yet answered, not yet too sure, not yet glorified by that first kiss—returned. On, on, over the shining rails, and the sun seemed lost in the sky somewhere over his head, till, spinning by a pool of gleaming water, the sly orb flashed a dazzling beam at him from its depths, like the sudden mighty hope in the heart when the sky of life seems dark and sunless. On, on, over the lengthening rails, till winter grew exhausted in the fearful race, and dropped back wan and dying. On, on, and the trees grew tall and thin, the sky-delivered sun poured golden showers upon the sodden earth, while the rank palms filtered his burning rays, and the gray moss swayed gently to show its willing service to the breeze. The lowly cabins, swarming with piccaninies, struck the eye like dapples of shade on a sunny canvas. On, on, till at last our wearied traveler saw the quaint battlement of the fort-protected city,—the city whose secrets of twelve years ago he had come to learn, come to drag if necessary from her unwilling breast.

He could hardly sleep that night, so anxious was he to seek out that old friend of Winona's, of whom his childish heart had felt a pang of jealousy ; the friend who had loved his golden-haired Winona, and then dared to forget her.

He was up and outside at break of day, too anxious and

excited to sleep a wink after the sun's first gleam at the window. How his heart beat at sight of the beautiful turrets, the massive concrete walls of the villa in which Winona had spent her unconsciously happy hours.

"Who owns the De Monteano villa now?" he asked of a toothless, white-woolled old negro passing by.

"Mars Dr. Links."—And the mumbling response sent a thrill of delight through Wilton's veins. Now he should talk with one who had known Winona, talk of her in the very rooms and halls through which she had been carried, the pride and darling of her parents' hearts. What folly to imagine that she came from any source less good, refined, and beautiful than herself, what entire congruity in the idea that this beautiful place was, indeed, her own true home!—Would that house never seem to be alive? He should consume, ere long, with impatience!

At last the gate was opened. Wilton stepped into the court and was asked by the old negro servant to take a seat in the portico, "till Mars Dr. Links find time to see you."

He sat down. It was the last of February. He saw the massive magnolias standing like rigid sentinels in the four corners of the court, he saw the glossy orange tree, hoary with age, yet still leaning its laden arms upon the wall. He heard the fountain still murmuring plaintively from the depths of its lily-cup throats. He saw the scarlet trumpet vine clinging to the side of the portico, and festooning the spandrils overhead; but no vision revealed to him the sunken, yet heaven-transfigured face of Leon De Monteano lying half buried in Turkish pillows, nor called into mystic existence, the bride-like form of Timosa standing on the landing above, breathless with awe, and bathed about with a broken shaft of light. No occult power filled his eyes with what

the spirits see. No voice from the gone-before told him the secret of his loved one's birth and parentage.

At length the old dorky appeared, to say that the doctor was ready.

Wilton was ushered into the long library, with its rows upon rows of books, its broad flat cabinet, and its massive oaken table.

The doctor sat before this table, his head leaning upon his hand. One lock of raven hair streaked with gray, hung over his broad forehead, as if seized by a vexed hand, the pointed beard was yet untinged with gray, and the figure was youthful, strong, and muscular.

Wilton took the seat the old servant motioned out to him, and watched this man, who did not even trouble himself to wish good-morning to his early visitor.

The face was more than half hidden by the hand upon which it rested, but Wilton felt the self-conquering force, the blunt independence, the dogged strength that seemed to emanate from the man's very presence. He felt young, weak, and ignorant beside him.

Presently the doctor looked up, and, sweeping back the lock of falling hair with a backward stroke of his broad hand, turned suddenly a pair of keen, yet kindly gray eyes upon his visitor.

"Now what can I do for you, sir?"

With the words only half parted from his lips, he started from his chair, and swept his hand across his eyes. "Who are you?" he demanded stammeringly, and without waiting for a reply, repeated, "Who are you?"

"Wilton Bearall, of New York," replied his visitor, wondering what kind of a man this might be, who demanded of a decent morning caller,— "Who are you?" and, "Who are

you?" again. He felt himself transfixed by those strange gray eyes, while, without seeming to have heard his answer, once more the question came from the pale lips apparently of its own volition, "Who are you, and what do you want with me?"

Wilton had a passing wild impulse to say, "Your money, or your life!" so fit did the moment seem for tragedy, and so out of all proportion to his simple morning call, seemed the stage-like greeting of this strange man.

But Adam looked not like one to trifle with, so Wilton, trying to steady his nerves and his voice, replied again, "I am Wilton Bearall, and have come to seek information about one called Winona de Monteano."

At this the doctor's eyes grew more strained, and his face more haggard. He stared at Wilton as though he were a ghost, and grasping the back of his chair, said falteringly, "What is Winona de Monteano to you?—Ah! I remember!"

Wilton felt insulted and chagrined. He believed this half-crazy man was filled with wine. With a flush of anger he took his hat and started to leave the room. This movement seemed to arouse the doctor, for his visitor had scarcely taken three steps, when he strode across the floor, and, placing his hand upon the young man's shoulder, said bluntly, "Stop! I mistook you for some one else.—But that was many years ago.—He could not look like this—now!"

Wilton was only half satisfied, and seemed minded to depart, but in a manner as winning as a moment before it had been forbidding, the doctor reached for his hand and, placing an arm across his shoulder, drew him back into the room, saying anxiously, "What have you to tell me about Winona de Monteano?"

"I have more to ask than to tell," replied Wilton, a little

nettled at having to talk over the affairs of his beautiful Winona with this man who had so early forgotten his professed friendship for her.

"She is alive, and well,—and happy, I trust?" said the doctor leaning forward anxiously for the answer.

"She is alive, and well," replied Wilton. "I believe it is in your power, to-day, to make her happy."

"You mistake! the day in which I had any power over her happiness has long gone by," said the doctor, quietly, motioning Wilton to a chair and taking the one opposite him.

"Pardon what may seem like rudeness," said Wilton, "but, if you will, tell me if there was any reason, other than a natural decline of your interest in her, that caused you to cease answering her letters."

"Decline of my interest! Fool!" cried Adam fiercely. "You talk of what you know nothing! I, who wrote to her when all hope of hearing from her was dead! Who are you, coming here with your smooth face to probe into my past life! By whose authority do you so intrude?"

"By Winona's authority," replied Wilton gently, moved in spite of the rough, savage words, by the expression of keen pain he had brought to his listener's face.

"By Winona's?" asked the doctor, in a suddenly changed voice, and with a nervous twitch of the lips.

"Yes, she has had great discomforts in the Stillwater household since she left the South, not the least among them being your apparent neglect of her letters."

"Have—have they abused her? Did *she* think I had forgotten her?" asked the doctor sharply, his face and manner betraying growing agitation.

Wilton, at loss for an answer, looked at his questioner in mute surprise.

Suddenly he started to his feet again and cried fiercely, "D—— them! They have stolen my letters! they have forbidden her to write! I always hated their cold, lying faces! But where is the little ring I gave her to guard against just such an outcome as this?"

"When they taunted her with her illegitimate birth she would not send it back to you for very shame, that, disgraced as she felt herself to be, she should need apply to you," returned Wilton.

"Her illegitimate birth," echoed the doctor in amazement. "What can you mean?"

"They tell her she is not the child of the De Monteanos, but the illegitimate child of another, from whose disgrace they sought to shield her by their name," said Wilton, waiting with suspended breath for his answer.

"Lies! lies! curse them!" cried the doctor, pacing back and forth in uncontrollable rage. "Why, why did she not let me know? I would have turned their black hearts inside out! Why have they done this? What could have been their devilish motive?"

"Heaven only knows,—unless it might be jealousy," replied Wilton. "Their own daughter loses greatly by contrast with Winona. This might have incited the deception. But are you sure of her parentage?"

"Sure!" ejaculated the doctor contemptuously. "Is any one ever sure of anything in this beastly world? See here, what about the property? What about the property, I say, young man!" he cried with dilating eyes, and shaking Wilton roughly by the shoulder. "Has she come into her property yet?"

"She has come into no property," returned Wilton, wondering. "They told her that the property had reverted

to the family in Spain, and they have given her to understand that their guardianship was a matter of friendship to the De Monteanos, affording them but the barest return for her care and maintenance."

"Oh!" growled the doctor between his set teeth. "What more do we want to know! What better motive for their devilish lies than the need of a plausible story to cover their theft. Are you too stupid to see their game, young man, say?"

"It is easy to suspect now, when one knows she was left money!" replied Wilton, quite oblivious to all rough remarks addressed to himself. "But are you sure she was left property?"

"Sure! Sure! don't exasperate me further with your timid sure, sures. Of course I'm sure. I took the utmost pains to convince myself of that, before that lying parson took the child away from me. I saw a copy of the will and I saw, too, 'I bequeath to my *daughter*, Winona de Monteano, the sum of—(I've forgotten the exact amount, but it was quite sufficient for her life). Does that look like illegitimacy? Does that look like dependence on a sneaking, lying parson? Oh, you have fallen among knaves and fools! Poor little Winona, why did I ever let you go?" The man bowed his head upon his breast, the picture of self-reproachful woe.

Wilton waited a moment in impatience. He was in such a state of excitement over the good news he had received that the miles and hours which intervened between himself and Winona seemed cruelly interminable. He trembled with exultation as he pictured the scene in which he should break the joyful news of her restored parentage, of her ample patrimony. Ah! was not he a lawyer? He would soon

wrest their ill-gotten gains from the dishonorable guardians ! But he wanted to be sure, *very* sure.

Looking up, he opened his lips to ask another question, but the doctor's head was still bowed upon his breast, his eyes had the inward look of one lost to all present surroundings, and his compressed, sorrowful lips made Wilton hesitate to intrude upon his thoughts.

At length drawing a deep sigh and raising his head, he seemed to become conscious once more of Wilton's presence and said vaguely, "Well?"

"I should like to get all the proofs possible before returning home," said Wilton. "Of course you remember both Leon de Monteano and his wife?"

The doctor nodded with an inscrutable look in his eyes. Then he suddenly gave Wilton a keen, critical glance which was half incredulous, half fearful, like the fixed and startled attention with which he had first regarded him.

"What do *you* know of Timosa Burbank, young man?" he inquired abruptly.

"Timosa Burbank, I?" said Wilton wonderingly. "I know nothing of Timosa Burbank. Was that the name of Winona's mother?"

"Yes," replied the doctor shortly.

"Did you know her before she was married?" asked Wilton.

"Yes," answered the doctor more tersely still, and shading his eyes with his hand. "But what is that to you?"

"Nothing," replied Wilton, "only my own grandfather's name was Burbank."

"Yours," cried the doctor. "Why don't you explain yourself? What are you to Winona de Monteano? Speak, boy! Don't stand there like a log!"

"I am a lawyer and am here in her interest," returned Wilton, evasively. "I have known her since she was a little girl, when she came with her guardians to spend the summer on my grandparents' farm. I asked you about your personal recollections of her parents because I thought I should like to know if you could trace a family resemblance to them."

"Winona never did look much like her parents," said the doctor.

"Perhaps she has grown to look like them," returned Wilton, drawing from his pocket a photograph. "Is this like either of them?"

He held the picture toward the doctor who seemed at first loath to take it, then grasped it eagerly from his hand. Turning half away he bent nervously over it, while the agitation of his manner became more marked, till, suddenly starting from his chair, he hastened from the room.

Wilton looked after him in amazement. He thought he had never seen such a mysterious, erratic man. His host was gone a long time and he fell to wondering over the strangeness of the coincidence which made his unknown grandfather's name the same as Winona's mother's. He would ask the doctor more about this. He had made up his mind never to meet the name of Burbank, without endeavoring, in some way, to trace it to the mysterious Burbank of the asylum records.

At last the doctor came back. His face was expressionless, his eyes dull and his step slow and heavy.

"I do not think there is any special resemblance," he said. "She is not at all like De Monteano, and though the contour of the face is something like her mother's the features and expression are quite different,—as they always

were. Would you mind my keeping this photograph," he added. "There has been some devilish work going on to break up the old friendship between Winona and myself. Her silence has been hard to bear. It would give me great pleasure to possess this picture of her as she now is."

Wilton struggled with himself. He was strangely jealous, just at present, of any preference for Winona, and was he not himself separated from her for several days, he thought with self-pity? But overcoming the selfish impulse to refuse, he said, "Yes, I think Nona would be glad for you to have it."

Dr. Links noted the affectionate familiarity of his appellation with a start, and the two men eyed each other with keenly jealous eyes, as one imagined the return of a successful lover, and the other saw the pictured face of his beloved hidden carefully away against another man's breast.

Dr. Links seemed to wait for his visitor to depart, but Wilton said with assumed indifference :—

"The person of whom I so strongly reminded you when I first came in was not a Burbank, I suppose?"

"He was not a Burbank," replied the doctor, with a return of his blunt, reserved manner.

"I am looking up my own family history as well as Winona's," Wilton explained, in a conciliatory tone.

"Then you probably have a hopeless task before you," returned the doctor grimly. "I am considerably older than you and I haven't found a trace of mine yet."

"Is it possible that you, too, are in the toils of a mystery?" asked Wilton with a glow of sympathy for this man who, on the whole, had rather outraged his feelings.

"My life has been a tangle of mysteries, a very pit of secrets," replied the doctor with unexpected frankness. "If

you live long enough in this world you'll find it's a queer place, young man," he added gloomily.

"I am already beginning to find that out," replied Wilton, pressing his advantage. "Would you mind telling me all you know about this family of Burbanks, and about the man I appear to resemble?"

"You would never thank me for giving you a clue that might connect you with the Burbank I know," replied the doctor, "for he is the very devil himself; nor, for that matter, would you thank me for tracing a relationship with the man you seem to resemble, for he is dead,—fortunately escaped early from the hate and evil intentions of the aforesaid devil, Burbank."

"You interest me very much," declared Wilton. "Can you tell me when this double of mine died?"

"Assuredly. The year is vividly impressed upon my mind," Dr. Links replied, with a peculiar expression on his face. "It was some time just prior to the spring of 1860."

"That was the spring in which I suppose I was born," said Wilton reflectively.

"Where were you born, young man?" asked the doctor, as though humoring his visitor's mood of investigation.

"Ah, that is what I should like to know!" replied Wilton. "That is what I am trying to find out."

"You'll probably never succeed," declared the doctor tersely. "Where were you brought up then?"

"On an old farm a few miles out of B——" said Wilton. "I was adopted, during war times, into a family by the name of Bearall,—What is the matter, sir?"

The doctor had grasped both arms of his chair and was leaning forward with a tense look of expectancy on his face.

"Nothing! nothing!" he replied testily, dropping back at

Wilton's question and asking carelessly, "What kind of a place was this old farm?"

Wilton proceeded to describe it with accuracy, running on with the details till he came to the old garret which he said Mr. Bur——

As he pronounced the first syllable of the word he started to his feet with an exclamation. "Why, Burbank is the name of the man who used to own grandfather's farm! I've never thought of it before!—and it's his things that have been locked up in the old garret so long, because the latch is broken and he has never given orders to have the goods removed!—Good Heavens, sir, what is the matter!"

"I guess one of the old spells I have had ever since I was kicked by that vicious mare," gasped the doctor, pressing his hand heavily against the side of his head.

"Let me get you something?" said Wilton anxiously. "I thought you were going to swoon!"

"I shall be all right in a moment, go on with your story," muttered Adam huskily.

"I don't know that I have anything more to say except that I have discovered another Burbank clue to follow up," answered Wilton. "I feel that I ought not to trouble you further. Besides, the door bell has been ringing. You must have a number of patients by this time."

"Sit still, I beg of you," was the reply. "Pompey," said he to the old darkey who came in answer to his ring, "tell people I am ill and can see no one this morning."

"All right, sah!" was the prompt reply, and the door closed behind him. Then the doctor seemed to recover himself by an iron force of will and asked quietly:—

"When were you adopted?"

"When I was five years old," replied Wilton.

"Where were you before you were adopted?"

"In the Home for the Friendless on Thirtieth Street, but I had only been there a week or two."

"Where were you before that?"

"I don't know that. I can only faintly remember being with an old woman who was ugly to me and was continually beaten by her husband."

"How came you at the asylum?"

"I was taken there, away from this old woman, who was taken up for drunkenness?"

"How do you know that your grandfather's name was Burbank?"

"The old woman gave that information."

"What did this old woman look like?"

"My recollection is too dim and vague to describe her."

"What was her name?"

"Polly Halsey."

At the words Dr. Links started from his chair, face livid, eyes staring, and body reeling like a drunken man. Time, place, name, resemblance, all complete. "The old woman stole the child, the old woman stole the child?" he repeated convulsively to himself! "My hands are clean! O my God, they're clean! they're clean!" and he sank into the chair, dropped his head upon his arms and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER XXI.

WILTON stood there trembling and forgotten. Speechless with astonishment, he surveyed the bowed head and shaken form of the man who had impressed him as so sternly strong ! What had his poor little story to do with this man's agony, this man's tragic joy ! Surely he was indeed beginning to realize the truth of the doctor's words, "The world is a strange place to live in."

He was too dazed and mystified with all the questions that the doctor had put ; and all the new links that seemed to have been suddenly supplied in the slender chain of his long lost pedigree to think calmly and reasonably of anything. One thought alone remained on which he might firmly rest, Winona's parentage was almost beyond question. He could hunt up further proofs later. As for himself, he both longed for, and dreaded this sobbing man's revelations. No more hoping, no more fearing, he should know now, once for all, whether he need be proud or ashamed of his ancestry. Whether he might feel himself worthy to offer his heart and hand to Winona de Monteano, scion of a proud and noble family. Suddenly he was filled with apprehension. What had Dr. Links said of this man bearing the name of Burbank ! Alas, this ! "He is the very devil." Better indeed to bear dear old Father Bearall's name than such a name as this !

Impatient of the delay, he touched the doctor on the shoulder—the bowed form was quiet now and Wilton ventured to speak.

“Sir, I regret having caused you all this sorrow by my little tale.”

Adam raised his head at sound of the young man’s faltering voice, and said brokenly: “Heaven grant that you may never have anything worse to regret. Had there been some merciful voice out of the Great Unknown to whisper this tale to me,—aye twenty years ago, my whole life might have been different. Instead of the husks, I might have had the kernel. Instead of shame, and bitterness, and hate, I might have had pride and tenderness and—love. Can you have any idea, Wilton Bearall, what it means to live alone and unloved, bound forever to the secret belief that you are a murderer, the murderer of a helpless child—and the child of the only being that you had ever venerated?”

Wilton had no reply to make. He had, indeed, no adequate idea of what such an existence might mean.

“Listen then, and I will tell you,” continued the doctor fixing him with dull, mournful eyes. “It is hell! It is perdition to every hope and ambition; it is damnation to every joy, to every dream of love and happiness. That was my lot. I believed I was a murderer, where I had meant to save. *You* are the child I believed dead!”

Wilton started and drew back unconsciously. He recovered himself almost instantly and murmured some words of apology, but the doctor stopped him with a gesture. “Quite right! quite right! That is the attitude I have always expected people to bear toward me,—an attitude of fear and loathing. Listen.”

Dr. Links began with his own life in the office,—his first sight of Timosa Burbank,—and told the whole strange story of her secret marriage, the scenes in the old farmhouse, the meeting of Timosa as the young matron of the villa, her

tragic death, his love for her orphan baby, the parting with Winona and then the long years of mysterious silence and neglect. He said nothing of the battle in his heart, when that strange hope of Winona's maturer love had dared to enter it. He said nothing of his slow despair when he saw those hopes blasted by her long silence ; he said nothing of the package of yearly letters lying in the little drawer by his side, some old and yellow, some fresh and white ; he told only the simple unvarnished story,—which indeed was full strange in its barest facts.

Wilton listened in rapt attention and with varying expressions of horror, wonder, and regret.

When the doctor finished and leaned back against his chair with half closed eyes, Wilton rose respectfully, and offering his hand, said with trembling lips : " This has been a wonderful day in my life, Dr. Links,—a day never to be forgotten. It has brought me great joy, it has untangled the web from which I scarcely hoped ever to be set free, It has given me a light heart to take back to Winona. If it has brought you no light on your own history, it has at least freed you from a nightmare of falsehood and doubt. I have only one more question to ask : You did not tell me why my face so startled you at first, who it was that I so much resembled ? "

" What ! do you not comprehend ? It is your father, who died before you were born. You are the image of him. Your name is neither Bearall nor Burbank, but Carlyle."

" I cannot take it all in," replied Wilton slowly. " I have heard so many new and strange things that I shall have to go by myself and think it all over before I get the facts straight in my mind. This, however, I do know, I owe you a debt of inestimable gratitude which I can never repay. Indeed, I

owe you my life which I never valued so highly as now when I feel at liberty to lay it at the feet of the noblest and purest girl in the world, Winona de Monteano. I owe it to you who cared for her as a child, to say that I love her with my whole heart. I hope—I believe my love is returned, and now that I may take her the assurance of her own proud name, and offer an honorable one in return, I have—no—words—to—Timosa Burbank!—Carlyle!—De Monteano! Good God, what have I said! Carlyle!—De Monteano! Children of the same mother! O God, no! A thousand times no! no! no!”

The doctor sprang forward just in time to catch the reeling figure, and, shaking him roughly, cried in a harsh voice:

“What! what! poison here too! blight and disaster following me as of old! What! is the truth, at last set free, already blasting the buds of hope, of promise! Go then! Out, out of a doomed house! Hoist a plague flag on the turret! shut the gates! and cry from the court ‘unclean! unclean!’ Once more the Burbank succession! the Burbank curse!”

He pushed the staggering young man to the door, turned and strode swiftly down the long hall, leaving a quivering trail of mocking laughter behind him.

Wilton stepped out into the scorching rays of the midday sun. Black specks danced before his eyes, numbness was in his feet and in his hands. Numbness sat upon his heart.

He walked blindly back to the hotel, gathered up his belongings, looked at his watch, and hurried to the station. Just in time! The guards sang “All aboard!” the bell rang, the brakes clanked and the train glided rapidly out of the station.

On, on, over the blistering rails, till the bleak coquina walls of the ancient fort sank out of sight, and the city of so

much hope, of so much joy, of so much despair, dropped out of view. On, on, till the red sun sank below the horizon and night settled down over the speeding train. On, on, with the darkness made hideous by strange noises, jolting berths and rocking sleepers,—while that ceaseless voice of despair whispered clear and keen above the din of thundering train or bellowing engine. On, on, while shamming winter crept on apace. The muddy snow lay piled upon the frozen ground; the river ran blocks of floating ice, the trees dripped long fantastic icicles, and the sleet beat upon the window panes. Home! where the fog hangs like a pall over the river, and the steam from the panting engines, blurs out the friendly twinkle of the flickering lights. Home to Winona with this strange unnatural news that binds her with a tie that seems worse than death. No, it is too monstrous! Nature herself would have asserted it! It is inconceivable, it is unnatural! it is grotesque,—*it is a lie!*”

CHAPTER XXII.

• WILTON awoke the next morning haggard and heart-sick. He had resolved what to do. He could never see Winona again till he had told her,—till she knew. How could he bear it, to meet her at the door, where, with that strange, new, shy light in her eyes, she would look up at him and ask tremblingly, "Oh, is it you, Wilton?" How could he shake her by the hand and say, with frank heartiness, "How do you do, Winona? Behold me! I am your new brother!" No, his lips would be glued together, his tongue would refuse to speak. Ah! there was only one thing to do—he would simply write all that he had learned, and leave it to its fate! There must be some loophole yet. There *was* some loophole! he knew there must be some fatal mistake. After all, he had no proof that Winona was the child of the De Monteanos. He had only Dr. Links' word for it,—and Dr. Links might be mistaken. He would tell the bare facts to Winona, taking care not to bias her mind. She might be able to wrest the real truth from the Still-waters.

He took pen and paper and sat down. Already his heart was growing lighter. The more he thought of it, the more plainly he saw that it was no more than an inference on the doctor's part that Winona was really a De Monteano. The links in the chain of evidence regarding his own birth he could not well dispute. They were too logical, too reasonable. But he had been foolish about this other matter.

Had not Winona assured him before he went, that Mrs. Stillwater was incapable of a lie? Besides, his heart, his very soul revolted at this unnatural thing. It was monstrous! It was impossible!

He found it difficult to write. But at last he had completed the task. He did not indicate, by any word, the revelation as it had come to him, he only wrote the conversations with Dr. Links as they had taken place, and left the inferences to take care of themselves.

So buoyant and tenacious of hope is youth, that Wilton rose from his task, actually light-hearted—unburdened of his fears. He only regretted that he had left Saint Augustine so precipitately, had not waited till his reason returned to him. Sometime he would go again and straighten this matter out. Meanwhile, he would not wait for Winona to answer his letter, he would follow it up with a call the next day. How his heart ached when he thought of her! How her dainty little hands had trembled when he left that stolen kiss upon them! How pure she was! how unattainable! and yet——

He took the letter, and running down the stairs, dropped it, almost cheerfully, into the nearest post-box. Then he hurried to his office and put himself hard at work, while his heart beat strong with ever-rising hope.

It was a beautiful evening. The long, drizzling, sleety rain had ceased. The streets were like a glade of ice, but the gaunt trees in Madison Avenue Park were transformed into a magic ice-forest, a wonderland of frosty beauty. The great electric lights shed a cold white radiance over the frigid majesty of the ice-clad trees, the yellow gas-lights on their borders blinked in fretful out-shown radiance. Anon

a gust of bold northeast wind swept over the frozen trees, clanking the heavy armor of their branches with idle pleasure.

Wilton passed by all this with but a dull sense of appreciation. The clink, clink of the street-car bell was a torment to his ears. It seemed to lessen so slowly the distance between himself and her,—and yet his heart stood still at the thought of being really there at last,—of meeting her,—of looking in her face and seeing——

“Thirty-eighth Street!” called the conductor, and Wilton found himself once more on the glassy pavement,—within a few doors of the house that shadowed his fate.

The moments in the reception-room seemed like hours, but presently, with a sickening throb of the heart, which deprived him of both speech and motion, he saw the door open, and Winona standing silent and expectant upon the threshold. He tried to move forward,—to speak, but for a moment the little figure held him spell-bound. Her brilliant eyes shone out of the pale oval of her face like gleaming stars; her parted lips seemed to have framed the question; “Well?”—and forgotten to close; the little white hand pressed unconsciously to her heart told its anxious beating, but there was no great fear, no harrowing knowledge, no shattered dreams hidden in the depths of her bright, questioning eyes.

“Wilton,” said a trembling voice, that woke him from his trance, “Wilton, you look strangely at me; has anything happened?”

“Happened,” thought Wilton, with a mortal numbness clogging his brain, “no, certainly, nothing has happened!”

“Have you bad news for me, Wilton?” asked the voice, with a pitiful quiver, as he put out his hand in silence. “Is

that why you did not come to me at once? I feared you were ill!"

"I felt that I could not come, Winona,—that next day. I was not well—I needed rest—I had pressing—duties," murmured Wilton in a half-unconscious way, holding the little, cold, trembling fingers, and dimly wondering what this disregard of his letter and its contents might mean.

"I fear that you have made yourself ill in your service to me," said Winona, gently, allowing her hand to rest in his, and looking up at him with timid, questioning eyes that made Wilton's benumbed senses reel.

"No service for you could make me anything but inexpressibly happy," he said, shaking off the horrid torpor of his thoughts and leading Winona to a chair. "You received my letter of course?" he asked with an effort.

"A letter?" echoed Winona with mild surprise, "no; did you write a letter?"

"Yes, I thought I would not keep you waiting, and wrote a letter the very next morning," replied Wilton, struggling painfully to tell only the exact truth, while that cold dread and miserable numbness at his heart rendered him incapable of one clear thought.

"That was very kind of you, Wilton," said Winona, gratefully, looking up at him again with those eyes that threatened to unman him, "but I have waited so long to know the truth, that one day more was quite endurable. Besides, if it is any bad news, Wilton, as I seem to read in your face, it would be easier to hear it from your own lips, to learn it with a friend standing by."

Wilton almost groaned aloud. It did not seem so easy now, as he supposed, to believe the doctor's positive assertion false. If she had received his letter, if she had known

the facts;—but where should he begin to tell her! what should he tell her!—how could he let her know!

Winona, wondering at his silence, said thoughtfully, “It is strange about that letter. Are you sure it was posted? How could it have been lost in such a short transit?”

“I cannot tell,” replied Wilton, dully; “but never mind. Now that I am here—I can tell you.”

“Don’t be troubled, Wilton,” said Winona, with brave, quiet gentleness in her tone. “I see by your face that you have nothing good to tell me. Well, I scarcely expected more! After all, my own life need be none the less pure because of my parents’ shame. Only I cannot live much longer in this house. It is, indeed, a painful home for one so dependent as I.” The tears struggled in her voice, and finally stole from the half-closed lids over her pale cheeks.

Wilton thought he should go mad at sight of them—and he so cruelly helpless to comfort her. Should he tell her that her shameful parentage was a lie?—and with this very seeming joy disclose a secret which would break his own heart—perhaps hers? Or should he leave her under the old impression—which, God only knew, might be the true one—and snatch her, forever, out of reach of this cruel, hateful home?

His heart leaped at the thought, while his conscience beat a warning with maddening insistence upon his brain.

Restraining himself with a mighty effort from pouring out, in one irresistible torrent, the pent-up love of his heart, he said tenderly:

“There is one thing, Winona, which at least you may believe to your comfort. Your foster father—Leon de Monteano

—left you an ample bequest in his will. Your dependence upon the Stillwaters is a cruel and shameful lie!”

Winona looked up in amazement, a glad relief creeping into her face. “How do you know that, Wilton?” she asked anxiously.

“Dr. Links saw a copy of the will, Winona. He took pains to satisfy himself of that feature before your guardians took you away with them from the South. And—O Winona! Dr. Links says they have not only tried to rob you of your fortune but have stolen your letters. He says that he wrote to you long after your letters had ceased.”

“O Wilton!” gasped Winona, horrified at the thought of the double treachery, “can it be possible? Can it be true? Think of it—and Mr. Stillwater is a minister!”

“I don’t wonder you are aghast!” replied Wilton—his brain clearer now since his thoughts were drawn from the necessity of immediate decision in regard to what he should tell Winona.

“Tell me,” he said at last anxiously, “did Mrs. Stillwater ever say to you with her own lips that Leon de Monteano had left you no bequest?” There was an awful inference that if she had deliberately lied about the question of the inheritance, she had also lied about the question of the parentage, and there would be one more reasonable, but to him unhappy, conclusion, that Winona was, in truth, Winona de Monteano.

Wilton felt a sudden sense of self-loathing that he should be fearing, with an unspeakable dread, the very revelation which Winona supposed him ready to hail with delight. Nevertheless, he waited with half-suspended breath for her answer.

She paused reflectively, and then said slowly, “No, I do

not think she ever did say positively that my foster-father left me no money. She said that the bulk of the property reverted, by a former will, to the family in Spain. When I asked her what became of the remainder of the property, she said that it went into other bequests. I think those were her exact words."

"Did she tell you positively that the De Monteanos were not your parents?"

"Yes," she declared—speaking of what Belle had said,—
'It is no more than the absolute truth that Leon de Monteano and his wife were not your parents,'"

replied Winona, sadly.

Wilton could hardly suppress an exclamation of relief, as he grasped at this mere straw of evidence in his favor. It was indeed true, as Winona had assured him, Mrs. Stillwater was incapable of telling a downright lie; the poor woman was probably forced to the other prevarication in order to shield her husband. Wilton felt a sympathy for her he would scarcely have believed possible. To his intense, eager desire, this frail plank thrown out to him looked like a strong bridge on which he might safely cross to the side of his beloved. *His* beloved, so near to him that he might touch her! O what folly! O what a rank, noxious lie he had suffered to canker in his breast! His heart and hers were proof enough! What a travesty on Nature's law! on God's law of Love! He was swept away by the flood-tide of his hope, of his great, yearning love. He looked at Winona. She regarded him in amazement at the strange joy of his face, regarded him with the tears of shame and orphaned loneliness yet unshed in her eyes. The faint spring-like fragrance of her garments reached him like the far off incense of a drooping violet; the soft sky-blue of her tear-

washed eyes wooed every deep longing of his soul; the sweet helplessness of the dainty, homeless little figure strained every aching cord of his heart.

"Winona! Winona!" he cried, the wondrous emotion of his face trembling in the ardent sweetness of his voice,—“O Winona!”

The blue eyes looked up at him startled—the lips quivered—an answering wonder, fear, and joy trembled on the upturned face,—responsive love escaped breathless from the parted lips that refused to utter a word.

"Winona!" he cried again, stretching out his arms to her, "O need I tell you! Do you not already know! Winona! my love! my own!"

Alas! Adam, no word for you? No tender voice to ask, "How is Adam, how is the old friend, the dear friend of my childhood?" Forgive them! all is forgotten!—lost! in the first sweet selfishness of love.

The study lamp burns dim in the book-lined library, the creeping hands of the faithful clock point silently to the hour of midnight. At the noiseless signal the deep-toned bell peals out the hour, twelve strokes, solemnly, one by one. The last echo dies quivering away, but the man in the great study chair does not stir. He is weary. He is sleeping. "Poor doctor, we never knew him to be ill before!" say his patients kindly. He has worked far into the night. Nature refuses to be defrauded longer. His head leans back upon the cushioned chair. The dim light falls upon his upturned face and intensifies its pallor, deepening the shadows beneath the closed lids. The black hair is swept from the broad forehead, the face is tranquil, and he sleeps—as peaceful as a child. Where have you been, Adam, since you

pushed your morning visitor so rudely to the door? Ah! forging away on the anvil of time—waiting for the evening shades to set you free. You will not leave the workshop, Adam, though the furnace be hot, though the arm weary, though youth and maiden, lost in love, pass gayly by your door and forget you. The Master has work for you, you with your brawny arms, your stout though tender heart. Though long delayed, the prize will be waiting for you when all earthly pleasure seems as dross. How calmly you sleep, Adam, how regularly the breath flows from your parted lips! Yes, your conscience is clear and clean at last. The cabinet doors stand wide, Adam, and the children's faces smile down upon you in your sleep. Ah! what precious thing is hidden 'neath your hand? A letter?—Only a little letter! How many in the drawer have you now? Some are yellow as the frost-tinged leaf. Sleep soundly, Adam, for the day brings ceaseless toil. There are the same hours of suffering to assuage, the same round of thankless tasks to be performed, the same scenes of death and sorrow to endure. Sleep soundly, now, with that hard-earned calm upon your face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE minister was alone in his study. For him, also, burned the midnight oil. But his face was neither peaceful nor was his weary body at rest. Why should this man, with whom the world had dealt so gently, wear the brow of corroding care? Why should his lean hand tremble and his sallow face seem to shrink from the yellow glare of the gaslight? Why should he seem listening for some unwelcome sound, and start so painfully at every sudden lifting of the shade, or slamming of the window-blind?

Ah! he has covered the evil deed for many years, but at last his sin has found him out.

He meant to turn over a new leaf in those days so long ago, when he took to himself the proud and unstained bride whose conscience was like a full armor of glittering steel. He would shelter his tainted soul behind that firm defense, till, healed of its many wounds and strengthened, he could once more sally forth to fight and bravely win the battle of life. Alas! behind the defense was neither warmth nor sustenance. Sheltered, he both starved and felt his blood congeal. What is shelter to a man dying by inches, alone and friendless?—He plunged once more into the battle of worldly lusts.

Poor Silas Stillwater! His life has been passed in a fiery furnace. How do you know what tainted blood Heredity had poured into his veins? How do you know how much

this man has suffered and overcome—you, who only see the sin to which he fell a prey? Ah yes! he has truly caused much suffering to an innocent soul, but who knows or cares what he has suffered in trying to pursue his godly calling with that secret sin upon his soul—has suffered—is suffering? “Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.”

Now death stares him in the face. He is wasting to a gaunt skeleton of his former self. His disease has been pronounced incurable and is already eating into the very marrow of his bones. It would only be a little while now, he told himself, how could he ever die in peace with this thing on his mind!

He unlocked with trembling fingers a small secret drawer at the back of his desk, and took therefrom a small old-fashioned photograph, then he unlocked his study door and glided into the drawing-room. Striking a match, he succeeded in quickly placing his hand upon the object of his search, and then glided back into his study, locking the door carefully after him.

That for which he sought proved to be another photograph. He placed it beside the first.

Bending over them, he gazed long and anxiously at the pictured faces, comparing the features one by one. Then he plunged his long lean fingers deep into his iron-gray hair, leaned his forehead upon the palms of his hands and sat there, while his arms shook and his gaunt figure trembled.

The paroxysm over, he took up the pictures yet once more, and giving them a last anxious scrutiny, groaned aloud. “The same, the very same! I have robbed my own daughter! She loathes me—and well she may; what had I to offer her but the remnant of a guilty passion. How the yawning grave

holds up the ghastly mirror of the past ! Merciful God ! is there no one to whom I can tell it ? ”

With a shaking hand, he thrust the photographs out of sight, staggered to his feet, and turned out the gas, then threw himself upon his knees in the darkness.

The next morning it was given out that the Rev. Mr. Stillwater was very ill. Wife and daughter went about the house with subdued voices and faces more sternly repressed than ever.

Winona was not asked to share their watch, and was left nearly always alone with her own absorbing thoughts. For weeks no member of the household had spoken to her unless under strict necessity. Belle, especially, had scarcely deigned to notice her presence since that unlucky evening when she heard Wilton's indignant exclamation against herself.

Wilton and Winona had been too deeply engrossed, those first few days of love, to be disturbed by any ordinary outside interest.

There had been a tacit understanding between the two that the matter of Winona's patrimony must be thoroughly investigated, but, as yet, the subject had not come up for earnest discussion between them. Wilton was beginning to think now, to get all those revelations of his southern trip straightened out in his mind.

As the strange details arranged themselves in order, once for all, in his memory, he felt stealing into his consciousness a mental anxiety and unrest which he had never before experienced. He still assured himself, with ever-increased fervor, that Winona's blood relation to himself was a preposterous supposition, and unsupported by one real proof ; nevertheless, it became daily clearer to his comprehension that he must go through life with a heavy secret on his heart,

a secret which he might share with no living soul, least of all with the unsuspecting young girl who had promised to be his wife. His own words came back to him—words which he had uttered from the deepest conviction of his heart to this same trusting girl. "Yes, secrets are sad things to carry through life. I hope never to have one in my future, at least one for which I am responsible. Even those that are held with the kindest motives are sure to lead to all sorts of unexpected complications, and cause more pain in the end than they have ever prevented." Poor Wilton! his cheeks burned, and his heart grew heavy at the memory of that callow, youthful sentiment. How clear and buoyant had seemed the air, before he left the nest; how easy to float through the fresh atmosphere, straight as an arrow to his goal: but how weak had been his untried wings; how the earth had seemed to rise up and strike him as he dropped blind and breathless at the feet of Love! Ah! he had forgotten the tares sown by his ancestors, he had not realized what it might be to disclose a secret which would not only blast his own life, but strike home to the very heart-core of one he loved dearer than life.

No, the die was cast! He must bear it now, he said to himself—for her sake as well as his.

The fate of the lost letter began to cause him terrible anxiety. What could have become of it! What would he not give to have it safely back in his own hands! Suppose it had fallen into the Stillwaters' possession! Horrible! He would not believe it possible! They would never dare to steal his letters, now that they knew so well his relation to Winona. Besides, had not the Rev. Stillwater given his formal consent to the betrothal and that, since the time the letter was lost? He would never have done it without inquiry had he

an inkling of the peculiar story. Then, too, there was that disclosure of the stolen property! He would never dare to bring up anything that might lead to an investigation!—Wilton shuddered at himself to think that he could be gaged the minister's mouth was gagged by his own sin from peering into his—Wilton's—secret. The same Wilton who had never done a mean, dishonorable deed in his life—who had earned good old Father Bearall's implicit faith in the excellence of the lost pedigree solely by the uprightness of his own character.

Well, the letter was gone! it might still worry him for a time; but he must bear it, make no sign, and hope for the best.

He saw now that it would never do to reveal to Winona any of the strange revelations in regard to his own history. He must keep that also close-locked in his heart. What if Winona, knowing that he was the child of Timosa Carlyle, should one day become imbued with that horrid, blasphemous idea that she, too, was a child of the same mother. Wilton quailed before his own mental picture and said, "No! a thousand times no!—better never pursue further the mysteries of his own lineage than risk such an awful complication as this." With what high hopes had he taken that trip South!—With what a heavy heart had he returned! Oh, that he had never seen that strange awful doctor, with his piercing, sorrowful eyes—his shuddering wail of long, horrid laughter! What a wreck had secrets made of his life! What a grim, lone, gloom-haunted look had the book-lined library, with no touch of woman's hand, with no echo of woman's footsteps!

A sigh like a stifled groan escaped from his secret-laden heart. He could have wished now that it had all been ex-

plained first (it was sure to have come out right) before his anxious, impatient love had burst its bonds. But it was too late, he must choke back all his fears.

How almost painfully he loved her, how the soft lingering touch of her lips soothed away all anxieties, how the clinging twine of her white arms about his neck, and the sweet pressure of her head upon his breast made him strong to carry a world-weight of secrets, for her sake! No wonder the doctor had grown hard and rough, and gloomy—Ah! the doctor! He knew the secret! What was to prevent his writing all this to Winona—now that the restrictions of their correspondence were swept away! Would he not write to advise her of her guardian's dishonorable stewardship, and pour out, in one fateful brief, all these peace-destroying secrets he now imagined locked safe in his own breast? Wilton's face was bathed in cold perspiration at the thought. He must stop it! he must write and appeal to him to disclose nothing! Appeal to him, in the name of the beloved girl whose pictured face was hidden upon his breast.—What! and let this doctor with his blighted life, his blasted hopes, his gloomy manner, his sorrowful eyes, his weeping, and demoniacal laughter come between him and his beloved! Come to stand like a gaunt, haunting, secret-smitten specter between her heart and his! O God, where! where would it all end!

Wilton could bear his thoughts no longer. He snatched his hat and went out into the open air. The busy city sounds struck his ear as they had struck Adam's so long ago, with no message of advice, with no promise of relief, only with the same old, sly, trite counsel, "Look out for number one."

He wandered aimlessly along. Passing a news-stand, he

remembered that he had not yet seen the morning paper, and listlessly threw down a nickel and held out his hand for the "Times."

Cramming the paper into his pocket, he wandered back to the office and, throwing himself into the nearest chair, pulled it out and tried to read. His eyes roamed aimlessly over the printed sheet, skimming everything but the head-lines, which he tried to read, but somehow could not understand. He was about to fling the paper down in despair, when his eye was suddenly arrested by the name which had become such a poignant barb in his thoughts—St. Augustine. He stayed his hand. What was it that had taken place in St. Augustine, that city of Winona's childhood, that city of his own most bitter memories? He read—

"SAINT AUGUSTINE, May 3rd.

"The Northern friends and patients of the well-known Dr. Adam Links of this city will be pained to learn of the disastrous outcome of his late accident. Not more than six months ago Dr. Links received a severe kick from a vicious mare which he was very fond of driving. The blow landed fairly upon the side of the head and came near being fatal. Ever since that time the injured man has periodically suffered excruciating pains in his head, leading, during the fits, to temporary mental aberration. These unfortunate spells have lately returned both with greater frequency and increased severity. The doctor has been incapacitated for work. It is now learned that the blow has resulted in violent insanity. It has been found necessary to remove the patient to an asylum. There has been a conference of eminent physicians over the sad case, with the result that no hope is entertained for the patient's recovery of either physical or mental health.

Dr. Links was a singularly reticent man. He lived in the most simple and retiring way, making a confidant of no one, having no intimate friends. He was known as a very eccentric man with keen judgment and blunt manners.

Those patients who have known him long declare that the blunt doctor was capable, under moving circumstances, of showing the most exquisite tenderness and sympathy, especially with afflicted children.

"It is an old saying that nothing good is heard of a man till he is dead. Apropos of this, lamentations are coming in from all directions, especially among the poorer classes, that their best and truest friend in time of need has been taken from them. Now that the doctor is incarcerated in this living tomb, it is indeed certain that there are many who will miss his skillful, patient ministrations.

"No relatives have yet been found. The property is at present in the hands of an upright lawyer to whom Dr. Links confided his fear of the very affliction which has overtaken him.

"F. C."

Wilton read this statement with conflicting emotions. His first feeling was one of intense and thankful relief, then he was seized with a pang of poignant self-loathing. He, to rejoice in this poor hunted man's last and greatest calamity! Dear indeed was he paying for the safety of his secret.

He tried to image clearly to his mind the awful blight which had last fallen over the career of this singular man, whose life-history he alone could tell. He let the facts of Adam Links's unhappy experience sink into his imagination, until he felt his eyes burn with unshed tears and his heart throb with pitiful sympathy; but above and beyond it all,

in spite of it all, he felt that glad exultant assurance that now his secret was safe, locked forever away behind bolted doors and barred window, entombed within that mind of living death, buried behind that broad over-reaching brow, beneath which the sad, yet wild eyes, looked out on a strange and unknown world. Wilton seemed to hear a mocking uncanny laugh ringing along the corridors of the sufferer's prison, and he bowed his head upon his hands, and shuddered,—shuddered that he had cause to rejoice—that he *must* rejoice over this man's misfortune.

When he had composed himself, it had grown dusk. He locked up his office-door and took his sad news and his heavy heart to Winona.

She met him with a tender but hushed word of welcome. Her guardian was rapidly growing worse ; he could not last much longer. She told him, with sweet, womanly decision, that there would never be any questioning of the lost patrimony now. She would never consent that the suffering man's last hours should be filled with the agony of his sin revealed. She could never happily use money, though a thousand times her own, which had drawn drops of anguish from a dying man's brow. Let his guilty secret die with him. Whatever there had been, it had been lost—certainly not used. It was useless to poison the memories of wife and daughter.

So the generous girl half declared, half pleaded, as though recognizing her lover's share in her decisions, and Wilton drew her against his breast, hiding his shamed face in her hair, conscious that his degradation was now complete. He had been glad with a quick frightened gladness that the minister's poor guilty life had nearly run its course. Now, indeed, his secret was safe.

Winona was not the first to disturb the long embrace, and Wilton held her there, his face buried in her hair, his shamed eyes closed, thinking of the ghostly secrets that had robbed one strong, good man of joy in life, and other secrets which snatched from a weak and suffering man his peace in death.

"Wilton, you seem sad to-night," said a tender voice, while a soft gentle hand stole up to his cheek and then passed slowly and caressingly over his hair.

"I am sad, dear. I have brought you sorrowful news of your old friend. I never told you, darling, that I left your photograph with him. I have been so glad since. He seemed hungry for a sight of your face, and after he had glanced at it, he rushed from the room as though he could not trust himself in my presence. When he came back, his face was sad and he put the photograph carefully away against his breast. If there are any times now in which he knows, I hope your face will give him comfort, darling," said Wilton, with an honest tremble in his low, regretful voice.

"O Wilton! what is it? What has happened to poor dear Adam?" faltered Winona.

He put the paper into her hands, and Winona read with the tears blurring her vision and running slowly down her face.

"O Wilton!" she said, with a pitiful little cry of vain regret, "and I never wrote him a word after you returned, though I meant to every day."

She buried her face in her lover's breast and sobbed in an abandonment of grief.

Wilton soothed her with a profound and heartfelt gratitude for his privilege; but they were grave and quiet lovers who, a little later, parted with such lingering tenderness at the door. Life, real life, was pressing heavily upon their hearts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FEW days after this, Winona received a small square package through the mail.

It bore a southern postmark, and at first she turned it over wonderingly. Presently she thought of Adam, and, with trembling fingers, hastened to undo the wrappings. The contents proved to be a package of letters, twelve of them, all neatly addressed in the same firm, concise hand. Could this be Adam's writing!—she had almost forgotten that hand. She picked up the first one.

“TO WINONA, May, 1874.”

She broke the seal with a strange sense of suffocation! Had Adam thought of her, then, year after year, and she had not even written him when she knew she might—she should! Poor lonely Adam! She had been too young to comprehend his solitary life then—but she saw it all now. How tenderly his great head had rested on her childish bosom, how hot the tears he had shed at parting, how they had rolled unheeded down his face while he wiped the childish dewdrops from her eyes.

Ah! the memory was dim, but not faded quite away.

Why had she not recalled it more vividly before? Why had she not put down her stubborn pride and kept this fresh spring open in the barren heart. Why, Why?

She read the lines with fast-blurring eyes.

"DEAR, DEAR LITTLE WINNY :—

"You have been gone from me nearly a year now. Your Adam is very lonely without you. Do you ever think of that, little one?—so lonely that the months since Winny went seem the longest of my life.

"But what does my little friend know of long days, long months, long years! Each day comes like a bright and beautiful pearl to you, darling. You are charmed and happy with its beauty, happy till the sand man comes and you fall asleep. Then you forget all about the pretty toy—so bright and passing fair are toys in dreamland. But never mind, to-morrow brings a new day—a new pearl. When the pearl comes to us, who are old and wise, Winny, we have not time to pause and note its beauty. We slip it on our string of pearls and forget to enjoy it. By and by we have a long day, a sad day, a sick day. With all our boasted wisdom we cannot work. Then we take our string of pearls, and as we count them one by one, we say, 'Ah! that was a beautiful pearl, a perfect pearl! Why did I not enjoy it when it was new and bright? Alas! there are so many now, they are all alike, their freshness is gone, they are dimmed with lack of care. Take them away, they weary me. To-morrow I will think in time.'

"What! do you not understand my pearl story, Winny? Never mind, dear, you will, then, by and by.

"You will soon be eight years old, darling. Are you not learning to write? I hope to receive a dear little note from you before this time next year.

"Your ever loving

"ADAM."

"Ah, yes, Adam, Winny is beginning to understand the

pearl story now!" said Winona as, with sad regretful heart, she broke one seal after another.

"MY OWN DEAR WINNY:—

"Nearly nine years old—just think of it! What a great girl you must be! I have been so glad of your few little notes, so glad to know that you are not forgetting me, with all the boys and girls in your city school. So you like the little black-eyed, curly-headed country boy best, do you, darling? Well, I hope he appreciates your preference. So he is an orphan, too, like yourself. No wonder you are drawn to him, dear. Do you know the old saying, 'Fellow feeling makes us kind'?

"I have had so few things in my life turn out naturally and well, that I sometimes fear that even our pleasant friendship will be broken. It seems to me, at times, from the contents of your little notes, that you have not received all mine. I keep a copy of one letter every year, dear, so that, come what may, you will some day know that I have not forgotten you. Do I write too old for you, Winny? Poor Adam is a strange hand at writing letters to little girls, but you will try to understand, I know.

"Your ever devoted

"ADAM."

Winona had never received either of these two letters. Could it be possible that Silas Stillwater had commenced to rob her of them so long ago? Ah! he must have had fear indeed of Adam's friendship, to withhold letters so innocent as these.

She read several more, all breathing the spirit of Adam's lonely life, his changeless love for his little friend, and an

anxious tone of fear lest he should cease to hear from her, lest she should forget him.

At length she came to one dated May, 1882.

“MY DEAR WINONA :—

“It is so long since I have heard from you, that I shall not venture to send this letter. My heart is heavy. How many, many times I have asked myself—on my long solitary drives, where some sickness, sadness, and suffering is sure to await me—asked myself over and over, ‘Has Winona indeed forgotten me?’ It is a heavy thought to carry always with me, dear. Just think what a light within my breast it would be to have the sweet and hopeful knowledge of your remembrance. So many men ask more than a mere remembrance, Winona—aye, and receive it. I have only asked a little place in your heart of hearts. You have forgotten! Well, I might not have been content then, dear child,—who knows? Human nature is a strange thing. It takes awful privations to keep us humble, to keep us content with little joys. Do not think for one moment that I upbraid you. Far from it. I know ’tis but the most natural thing in all the world that your childish acquaintance should have slipped out of your busy thoughts. I would not have my loneliness leave one single sting on your dear heart, it is only my misfortune that I am such a solitary man, that I only had one little ewe lamb, that it was so dear to me.

“I look toward the little drawer where this poor letter—so small a part of my aching heart—will be put away with the others, and wonder when and where you will see them all, if ever, and how many of them you may have received and never answered. Strange that my old heart is too proud to go and learn from your own lips——”

"O Adam ! why indeed, were both our hearts too proud and vain," cried Winona bitterly.

She took up the next letter. As it proved to be substantially a copy of one which we have already transcribed, that one so unceremoniously destroyed by Silas Stillwater, we will not follow Winona in her tearful perusal of it.

There were two more. The first, we will pass without comment, the last read as follows :

"DEAR WINONA :—

"The last and most cruel blow of my life has come to me to-day. Who could have thought that my long, silent, and hopeless love for you would end in an unconscious stab at the very fountain of your dearest hopes. Surely my life is accursed. Upon whatever I lay my hand, be it only that it is dear to me, and the beauty of its life is blasted. All things beautiful droop and die beneath my touch. I am a man marked, set apart, a source of evil and death to all I love. Through it all, my own heart will not call me vile, a thing unnatural and unclean ! This blighting force seems to be a thing apart, yet of me. I use no weapons, yet the blow is dealt. It comes like the lightning from Heaven, strikes that I love beside me, and leaves me trembling by the fallen, like a murderer caught in the act. I fear to look upon my own hands lest blood be there.

"You would wonder how I could go on living through it all. There is one thing that sustains me, Winona. It is the thought that indeed, indeed, in spite of this awful evil that seems to link its devilish fate with mine, my life is clean, my heart is pure, kept pure by the sweetness of the living fountain kissed into life by your baby lips. I have walked safely through the mire of deep despair, by the cooling

power of that one sweet stream. Oh, Winona, there are some to whom is given only one talent, there are some who are placed in life with a somber cloud over their first trembling footsteps toward the light, but there are none whom God holds accountable that have not one talent to their aid. My talent has saved me. It is the power to love so pure a thing as a little child. Through you I learned hope from despair, through you I learned purity out of filthiness, through you I found God, through you I shall, at last, find Heaven. The way has seemed dark beyond all human reason, and now this last sad blow has fallen, Satan calls upon me to curse God and die. But life shall come out of death. God will find somewhere in my darkened heart that little spring of pure and living water."

The majesty of this man's suffering soul crept into Winona's heart. It was something that transcended her comprehension, this triumph after bitter struggle. She knew not how to explain the hidden meaning of his words, but she felt the power of the heart behind them. Whatever that last sad blow might mean she knew not. It might refer to the dread calamity which he felt would overtake him. The torture of his darkening mind would easily account for the mysterious inferences of the letter. She was exhausted by the strain of her emotions, and carefully wrapping the letters once more together, crept off to her room.

The house was growing dark. Presently the maid came to her and murmured, "Did you know Mr. Stillwater was growing worse?"

"No," replied Winona in a startled voice. "Has there been a change?"

"They think the great change is coming fast, miss," answered the trembling maid in a tone of awe.

Winona waited in keen anxiety a long time. She heard steps passing to and fro across the hall, doors opened and shut. Belle went weeping to her chamber, but no one thought of her.

By and by Mrs. Stillwater came to the door, and in the old repressed tone which even impending death could not change, said steadily, "Mr. Stillwater wishes to see you."

"Me," murmured Winona trembling.

"You," replied Mrs. Stillwater, moving to her own room and closing the door after her.

Winona crept, with a vague, sickening dread, to the door of the sick-room. She turned the knob lightly and glided in. The room was empty of attendants. Winona was about to turn back in search of some one, but the man on the bed beckoned her, with a feeble gesture, to approach.

The invalid lay bolstered up among the pillows. His eyes looked out of his death-stricken face with an anxious and glassy stare. Winona's pitiful soul forgot everything but the picture of suffering before her. Those pained eyes had a haunted look. How thankful she was that she had done nothing, said nothing, to make this dying hour more bitter.

She moved noiselessly to the bed, and placing her own warm palm over the cold fingers, said gently,

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Stillwater?"

"Is every one gone?" he asked with an effort.

"Every one," she replied, "but myself."

"Tell me, then," he said feebly, with a slow painful movement of his blue lips, "could you forgive a man who had wronged you, if you knew his dying soul could not go in peace for a secret which he dared not disclose?"

"Yes, Mr. Stillwater," replied Winona, pale but steady, "if the soul could go in peace because of my forgiveness."

"Winona," continued the labored voice, "it would be cowardly for a man to disclose, on his deathbed, a sin which in life he was too cowardly to bear. Do you think so?"

"You mean it would be cowardly for a man to leave his family to bear the shame of a guilt which in life he would not take the brunt of. Is that it, Mr. Stillwater?"

The dying man nodded assent, his glazing eyes brightening at her comprehension.

"Yes," she said huskily, "I think it would be cowardly!"

The sick man's face was lightened of a great burden. He tried to touch her face with his hand, but his arm fell powerless.

"Winona, have you ever cared for me a little, only a little?" he urged, in pitiful trembling accents. "Oh, if you could have seen into my heart—sometimes—sometimes when I was helpless to do—to say—Have you been so miserable in my home, Winona?"

"You—you were good to me when I was a child.—But oh! the miserable secret of my birth! Why have you kept it?—Why do you not tell me of my parents?" she burst out, forgetting his weakness in the sudden rush of her emotions.

His face turned livid and he gasped out, "My God!—That was the greatest sin of all. How can I put her—to shame—make her despise my cowardice—loathe my memory! Spare me!—Winona, look at me—Can't you see—without asking?—O God, this is torture—this is—awful!"

His face was ghastly to look upon in the anguish of its despair—in its struggle with pitiless death.

Winona was shocked at what she had done. She bent over the dying man with infinite pity and tenderness, saying soothingly:

"Forgive me! Forgive me! Do not think of it again. It seems to me I understand. It shall be safe with me. It is enough for me to feel the truth in my heart. Do not let it cause you sorrow!"

The anguish faded slowly from his stiffening features. "Thank God," he muttered feebly, "it is more than I deserve."

He lay so still for a moment that Winona thought he was gone, and sprang up to call help. But at the sudden movement, he opened his eyes and his lips moved painfully.

"Winona, could you so forgive me—that you could—kiss me once before—? My life has been barren of love—it was my punishment—I deserved it—But I have often thought—forgiving love—might have—saved me."

He stopped, panting. Winona, her tender heart melted with a flood of pity, slipped her arm under his neck, drew his gray head to her bosom and kissed tenderly the chilled brow.

"O Winona," he murmured with a fluttering sigh. "God is good—I believe He has—forgiven me."

He turned his head heavily and pressed his lips against her bosom. "Thank God!—I can die in peace—Forgiving love—has saved me."

A change crept over his features and, laying his head back upon the pillow, Winona hastily summoned his wife and child.

None too soon. He raised his eyes contentedly to their faces and passed away.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE last sad offices for the dead had been performed. Once more the Stillwater family pursued its calm, cold, methodical mode of life. If the widow had spent long hours of the night, sleepless and in tears, her pale eyes guarded this secret also. There had been no outbursts of grief before the family.

Belle was not less reserved in her grief, but more restless. She wandered aimlessly about from room to room. Sometimes her eyes suggested tears, but more often they glittered feverishly, while an inscrutable anxiety was visible upon her colorless face.

There were times when she seemed to court the presence of her dead father's ward, and once Winona met the glittering eyes with a look in them which made her ask, "Was there anything you wanted to say to me, Belle?"

But Belle, starting with angry surprise, answered cuttingly, "What could I possibly want to say to you!"—and abruptly left the room. When they met again, Belle acted as though ashamed of her outburst, but she offered no apology for her rudeness. From that time on, she avoided Winona with greater care.

When the deceased man's will was read, it was found that Winona was to share equally in the little property with Belle. The three interested listened to the reading with varied emotions. Winona, surprised and disconcerted, dared not

lift her eyes to the face of either mother or daughter. Mrs. Stillwater gave one anxious glance at Belle, but she was gazing straight before her without even a flickering expression of surprise or inquiry, with only that scornful curving of the lips which her mother had learned both to fear and dread.

Not a word was said by any one of the three, after this formality had been gone through with. Mrs. Stillwater remained to talk with her lawyer, but Winona and Belle went each to her own room.

In the privacy of their chambers, mother, daughter, and ward had much to ponder over.

Mrs. Stillwater, after parting from her lawyer, sat down by herself to think. Over and over again Belle's cold unflinching face came back to her. What hidden perception of forbidden secrets lay behind the implacable scorn of those proudly curved lips?

More than once the mother had been confronted by the keen, relentless discernment of her daughter's subtle mind, but never had it brought her greater uneasiness, sharper mental suffering. She felt helpless, condemned, before her own child. She had considered it incompatible with her duties as a mother to hold the secret of Winona's parentage from Belle, but she reflected, with a sudden dull glow of spiritual confusion, that her ideas of maternal responsibility had never advanced to the ordeal of disclosing that other secret.

Why, then, should Belle have received that peculiar division of the property with never a gleam of surprise, or a glow of indignation upon her face?

Mrs. Stillwater could not satisfy the strained inquiry of her own mind. She wrestled with an unknown quantity and suffered keenly in consequence.

A peep into Belle's room would have further mystified her distressed mother.

Safe behind her own bolted door, the scornful expression of the young girl's face changed to one of painful anxiety and irresolution. From a place of hiding, she drew forth a letter and, dropping into the nearest chair, perused it with absorbed intentness and knitted brows. It was a long letter, and she was long in contemplation of it, for, more than once, she stopped with her finger on a certain line, and abandoned herself to a puzzling study of its meaning. When, at last, she came to the signature, her face suddenly flushed a deep red, and with a fierce impulse she crushed the name against her lips, then threw the letter from her with a bitter cry and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

Belle was unused to weeping, and the sobs shook her thin figure violently. But the paroxysm was as short as it was severe. Presently she raised her head and, staring into space with unseeing eyes, again abandoned herself to her thoughts.

The name which had called forth such an unusual demonstration was that of Wilton Bearall, and the letter was the long-lost one, sent by Wilton to Winona, after his trip South.

This, then, was the secret of its non-receipt. It had fallen into Belle's jealous hands, and she had yielded to the temptation to appropriate it.

"Like father, like daughter." It seemed in this case as though the only natural inheritance which had come down from father to daughter was the unfortunate man's proneness to sin. As in the dead man's case, the sin had swiftly brought its own punishment. Belle reflected that if she had allowed the letter to reach its proper destination, the very outcome which she had set her jealous heart to avert—

namely Wilton's marriage to Winona—would have been voided. Now she saw no way to have Wilton's intended information reach Winona without exposing her own shame and duplicity.

She saw also that, after the letter was lost, Wilton must have failed in courage to tell Winona, and thus had left her still ignorant of its contents.

Belle did not herself believe that her mother had grossly lied, and that Winona was in reality the child of the *De Monteanos*. But, after learning, by the contents of Wilton's letter, the deception which had been practiced in regard to the property, she felt that there had been at least this one chance to prevent the marriage—a chance which she, herself, had rendered futile.

At times she decided to take the letter to Winona, confess her theft, and receive compensation for her shame in Winona's dismay and anguish of heart. Wilton would not dare to despise her altogether. Would not the restored letter also reveal his sin and dishonor?—Belle only loved him the more for his weakness. It brought him nearer to herself.

When her decision had several times almost resulted in action, Belle had been restrained by the thought that her mother, confronted by such circumstances, would tell the real truth at any cost. That truth, should it be the old story of Winona's illegitimacy, would be final—fatal to her own desperate hope of love. Belle could not conceive that Winona would refuse to forgive her lover for his deception.

Thus, on mature reflection, she had ever been undecided which course to pursue, and again determined to hold the last chance in her own hands and wait for developments. Who knew what might happen in the interval.

She carefully returned the letter to its old hiding-place

and bathed from her eyes the traces of her passionate tears.

There was only one new thought evolved from the long and silent meditation. Belle had resolved to change her manner toward both Wilton and Winona. Their assurance of her good-will toward themselves might stand her in good service yet.

A few days after this, Winona went to Mrs. Stillwater and frankly asked that lady if she desired her to remain longer a member of the household.

Mrs. Stillwater paused for one moment irresolute, but, to Winona's great surprise, Belle interposed with cordial decision.

"Why, of course, mamma, I am very sure we should be sorry to lessen our household by one more so soon after poor papa has left us."

Winona thanked her, regarding her at the same time with wide-eyed surprise. Mrs. Stillwater, confused with amazement, murmured some word of assent and turned a scrutinizing gaze upon her daughter's face. But Belle received both looks unflinchingly.

Winona awaited her lover's coming that evening with impatience.

She had not yet told him of the painful and pitiful half hour with her guardian. At first it seemed too sacred and solemn—the dying man's half-confession and plea for forgiveness—but it was Wilton's right. How glad he would be—for her.

Her heart beat exultantly as she opened the door for him, but she would not tell him yet. Let the least important news come first. She would anticipate his delight a little longer.

So she followed the first greetings with an account of Belle's unexpected cordiality.

Wilton listened without enthusiasm, even with some suspicion. He was surprised to find himself growing unaccountably suspicious, as well as restless and moody. In spite of the strange way in which fortune had seemed to protect his secret, he was still harassed with vague fears of future complications. With the false reasoning often resorted to by a burdened conscience, he argued to himself that the only way in which doubts and fears could be put to flight would be to make the course he had taken irretrievable. When he was alone he was miserable, anxious, distrustful. Let him but feel Winona's hands in his and take one deep look into her untroubled eyes, and peace came back to him like a breath from Heaven—he was himself again.

So he had come, the plea for an early marriage swelling in his heart and trembling upon his lips. But he would wait for her story. He could not help seeing that something untold, even painfully suppressed, was kept for him in Winona's heart. So he smiled into her tell-tale face and playfully demanded her thoughts.

"You see I shall never be able to keep anything from you," she said, surprised at his discernment, "but I shall find no fault so long as you give me your eyes to read also. It is about my parentage, Wilton. I think I have new light on it again."

"How? what?" he asked, giving her a quick startled glance of scrutiny.

"Mr. Stillwater called me to him just before he died, Wilton. I promised him that I would never degrade his memory before his wife and child, and he let me see for myself what he dared not tell me with his own lips. He

could not die in peace with the secret on his mind. I felt it was but right that you should know, but you must never forget that it was a solemn promise, Wilton. The poor man showed bravery at the last. Even to ease his own conscience, he would not put upon his wife and child a burden which he himself had been too cowardly to bear."

"Winona, you torture me!" cried Wilton almost roughly. "Tell me what he said! What of your parentage."

Winona gave him a look of amazement and grief. A deep red glow spread over her face as she faltered, "I did not think you cared so much, Wilton. I never would have——"

"O Winona, don't!" he interrupted pleadingly. "You don't understand. Tell me about it."

Winona's lip quivered as she looked into his drawn face. He frightened her. What had come over him!

But she bravely controlled herself and said gently, "He asked me if I did not think it would be cowardly to leave his family to bear the shame of a guilt which in life he would not take the brunt of."

"What did you say, Winona?" asked Wilton huskily.

"I said I thought it would."

"What else, dear?"—his voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"I reproached him for keeping the secret of my parentage."

"Yes!"

"He seemed to be filled with sudden remorse and cried in agony, 'That was the greatest sin of all,' but he would not confess, restrained by the thought of his wife and child. He begged me to spare him, and asked me if I could not see for myself. Then I seemed to understand that he wanted me to know the story of my illegitimate birth was no more.

true than the other. After that I begged him to think no more of it. He died in my arms, Wilton, and said that forgiving love had saved him."

"Is that all, Winona?" asked Wilton, raising his pale face and looking into her eyes.

"Yes, that is all," she replied, regarding him with anxious wonder.

"You might have been mistaken, Winona," he said gently.

"Yes, I might not have comprehended what he really meant to convey, but I think I did. Until it is really proven otherwise, I shall take the secret comfort of believing myself the child of the De Monteanos. "Oh!" she cried suddenly, a light breaking over her troubled face. "Now I understand. You feel that I am nearer to you with my unknown parentage than as the child of the De Monteanos. Wilton, Wilton! Cannot you understand that no mere ancestry or lack of it can ever stand between us. I love you, Wilton! I love you!"

Wilton trembled with uncontrollable emotion as he strained her to his heart, and exclaimed brokenly, "God bless you, my darling, God bless you. Forgiving love from such as you will save us all."

The plea for an early marriage which had swelled in his heart and trembled upon his lips was never voiced.

CHAPTER XXVI.

So several months slipped by and it was again mid-winter.

In St. Augustine, all was bustle and activity, for the promising influx of winter visitors bid fair to make the season more than usually successful.

About the gates of the villa, so long closed, a group of people were waiting expectantly. It was early morning, but the impatient visitors, who seemed to be agitated by some suppressed excitement, finally broke out into grumbling at the long delay.

"Give the poor man a chance to take one good nap, can't you? If he don't git it on his first day home, he ain't likely to," expostulated one rough fellow with the bronzed face of a fisherman.

"Sure enough he ain't likely to, while you're livin'," responded one of his own kind, punching him in the ribs. "How many will this one make, Jake? Seven, ain't it? Some people ain't got no conscience about crowdin' the population."

"An' some people don't know any better'n to show it when they're jealous," replied the first speaker, grinning consciously, and shifting his awkward weight from one foot to the other.

"Well, I guess you won't be the only one that's glad to see Dr. Links home agin and all right. They say that half the village met him at the station and hurrahed for dear

III. Old Harris was there and he says the doctor looks like a new man and ten years younger'n when he went away. Truth is, he pretty near worked himself to death. No one cared a fig about savin' him while he had a bit of go in him, but when there wasn't no Dr. Links to call on, they began to find out what he'd done for 'em. I thus told Nancy that he'n' dead wot, but went half as far toward makin' him crazy as the mare's head."

Standing apart by themselves were three men who evidently belonged to the better grades of society. They were conversing earnestly in low tones.

"I never expected to be waiting for the doctor at his own gate again," said one. "It was just awful to see him that night he put his property into my hands. He realized exactly what was going to overtake him, and he was that haggard and wot it made one's heart ache to look at him. He said he hadn't a relative or friend in the world to care whether he lived or died. When I tried to make him see how necessary he was to his patients and how much they thought of him, he just laughed at the idea—and such a laugh! it made my blood run cold. I knew then there was no hope for the poor fellow, his tears were already coming free. In settling up his affairs he only seemed to care particularly about one thing, and that was that there shouldn't be any mistake about sending a package of letters to some woman up North."

"He little shot of a miracle that he is himself again, and free from any fears of a return to insanity," responded one of his listeners. "It is wonderful what surgery accomplishes in these days. Not many years ago the idea of regaining the soul would have been looked on. People thought that if by the devil they could save death, now

they don't hesitate to manipulate the head with almost as much freedom as they do other parts of the body."

"Surgery has certainly done a great thing for Dr. Links, and I'm not sure, now it's over, that the kick was the worst thing that ever happened to him—though one knows so little of his life it's hard to judge. At any rate, people have learned to appreciate both his character and his services, and it is to be hoped that he will hereafter be rated somewhere near what he is worth."

"You can't blame people altogether for not appreciating him," remarked the third man, who had not spoken before. "He usually shows to people such a queer, rough side of his nature that it takes years of ordinary acquaintance to bring out what, under some circumstances, one sees in an hour. I'll never forget what a revelation he was to us when my little girl was so ill. No mother could have been more sympathetic and tender. My wife was nearly frantic with grief. She would not let even me touch the child, but walked back and forth across the floor, like one demented, with the little thing tight in her arms. I hesitated to send for Dr. Links, for she had never liked him, and always said he was more like an overseer than a doctor. When I couldn't stand it any longer I sent for him, without saying a word to any one. He came immediately, and I must say my heart sank as he entered the room. He looked so unsympathetic and so severe. Before I had time to make any explanation, he gave one glance around the room and his eyes fell upon the child in its mother's arms. He strode across the floor, placed his hand upon my wife's shoulder and turned her about to the window, so that the light fell upon the baby's face. It is the solemn truth that his lip quivered, and he looked into my wife's haggard eyes with a gaze of sympathy and sorrow I

shall never forget. He held out his arms and she placed the little one in them without a word. I'm not ashamed to say that I broke down then out of sheer relief. It seemed to me that Dr. Links would pull the child through, and so, thank God! he did. He never left her a moment till she was out of danger."

"He's a strange man!" responded the two listeners, sympathetically. "But there goes the gate at last!"

White-wooled Pompey stood at his old place trembling, bowing, and grinning in sheer rapture over his renewed service. To the eager questions as to whether the doctor was able to see morning visitors, the beaming old negro responded joyfully, "Good as new, sah! good as new!" and ushered them all in together, regardless of age or station.

There were too many for the office, so they waited in the library, talking excitedly in whispers. Presently there was a step in the hall and the doctor entered by his private door.

He looked abashed as he saw the waiting crowd, but after an instant of embarrassing silence, the quavering voice of an old man at the back of the room sang out, "This ain't no kind of place, but I say, Hurrah for the doctor!"—and they gave the cheer in a way that made the books quiver on their shelves and the paneled ceiling ring.

Then the lawyer stepped up, and grasping the doctor's hand said heartily, "Welcome back, Doctor, we're glad to see you home again. St. Augustine has missed you and your services more than you can know."

Then they crowded round him and each in his own peculiar way expressed joy for his recovery and return. Though the doctor wrung each hand in turn, the surprise of the ovation seemed to deprive him of words, and he only managed to

falter out, as the last one proffered his congratulations and good wishes,

"Friends, I'm a man of few words, and fewer good deeds, and that's why you've taken me clean off of my feet by your unexpected kindness. I'm ashamed not to be worthy a tenth part of it, but if there's anything in the world that can make me approach anywhere near to worthiness, it is the unlooked-for and undeserved knowledge that some of you, all of you, are glad to see me back. It's more than I ever expected in this world, friends, and it's something I'm not likely ever to forget. They say every dog has his day. My day has come at last, and I find it was worth waiting for."

The most elegant speech in the world would not have pleased the honest souls like this faltering but heartfelt appreciation, so they gave him another enthusiastic cheer and filed out of the door, carrying away with them the imperishable gladness which comes of making a fellow-mortal happy.

The next morning there appeared in the St. Augustine papers a pleasant account of Dr. Links' return to his home and the enthusiastic reception tendered him by his old patients and friends. But only this brief comment appeared in an obscure corner of a single New York daily, "The distinguished surgeon, Dr. Adam Links, of St. Augustine, Florida, has been restored to health and reason through the surgical operation known as trephining. He is once more settled in his old home ready to resume his labors."—Our daily papers rarely consider good news, news.

For three blissful days, Dr. Links wandered about the house and through the court, absorbed in the happiest contemplations of his life. There was the joy of restored health and mental vigor;—a joy which, alas, we never truly experience except by contrast with a season of suffering and

weakness,—there was that almost incredible thought of his place in the grateful hearts of his patients ; and there was the old, yearning, tender remembrance of Winona.

Somehow, his heart was more prone to look on the bright side of life than it had ever been before. He began to ask himself anxiously if he, perhaps, had not greatly helped to make his own past bitter by his unreasonable pride and lack of faith in himself. He had kept away from Winona all these years. Why?—because he was too proud to go to her,—but then he had felt the cloud of that supposed murder hanging over him. Now, that was swept away. He had earned for himself an honorable name. What mattered it that his ancestry was buried in oblivion ! His position and his reputation were secure and enviable. He remembered the letters and was glad that they had gone to her. He was not ashamed of them. Nothing could have shown her more truly the depth of his devotion, the constancy of his love.

He wondered at himself, now, that he had taken Wilton Bearall's disclosures so much to heart. After all, the boy was not even betrothed to Winona, he only said that he believed his love was returned. Such young hearts were always hopeful, if not even too presuming. Perhaps Winona had never really loved him. Perhaps before Wilton Bearall had reached New York again, he had accepted the situation of his blood-relationship to Winona with philosophical wisdom and not too great pangs. The young adjust themselves readily and easily to the changes and caprices of fortune.

So Adam Links reasoned, younger by far than ten years in that restored mental vigor of his. His first taste of love and appreciation was lifting him into a seventh heaven of confidence and good cheer. He almost decided to write to Winona.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE fourth day of idleness brought the first call to duty. Dr. Links responded gladly. He was anxious to be at work. He longed to feel the power of his old skill creeping into his fingers. He wanted to test the restored memory, and the possibilities of quick, concentrated thought and action.

The patient was a winter visitor at one of the hotels.

"A hopeless case, I guess, Doctor," remarked the clerk lightly, as Adam stopped at the office to inquire the number of the room.

When he entered the sick chamber, he saw a pitiful sight. The wretched, gruesome figure of a man sat bolstered up in a chair. Except for his iron-gray hair, one could not have guessed his age, for he was bloated almost beyond the semblance of a human being. His cheeks rested heavily upon the collar of his gown, and his swollen, disfigured hands lay helpless upon the arms of the chair. His head hung low over his breast, his mouth dropped wide open, and his bleared eyes looked out of the bloated face with a dull vacant stare.

"The last stages of Bright's disease," said the doctor to himself, as an obsequious attendant placed him a chair.

"Are you the nurse?" he inquired, ignoring the proffered chair, and measuring the man with a critical glance of his keen eyes.

"Yes, I hold that position," replied the individual addressed, and, as he spoke, he returned the doctor's searching

gaze with a glance so subtly penetrating that Adam's attention was instantly arrested.

He saw a tall thin figure with narrow, stooping shoulders. A thick, short neck, supporting a small, brutally-formed head and square face; a low contracted brow, shrewd, evil-gray eyes, thick nose, wide mouth, and coarse, closely-cropped beard, made up a personality far from pleasing.

Adam's scrutiny was returned in kind, and he looked away from the evil eyes with a feeling of ill-defined uneasiness and distrust.

"Strange specimen for a nurse," he mentally observed, turning his attention again to the patient.

"How long has this man been ill?" he inquired.

"He has been ailing a long time, but he's been pretty bad now for five or six months," was the reply.

Adam studied the figure in the chair with professional solicitude.

"How long has he been in St. Augustine?" he next asked.

"Only a few days," responded the nurse.

"Only a few days!" echoed the doctor. "How came he to start for St. Augustine in such a condition?"

"He has had an idea that change of air would cure him, and has been wanderin' about from place to place for a long spell."

"Strange that his physician would allow it," said Adam wonderingly. "Who is his family physician?"

"Well, I guess it would be hard to tell," replied the nurse. "He allus says he ain't got no use for doctors."

As he spoke, Adam became conscious that a double meaning lurked in his voice, and shot furtively from his narrow, wicked-looking eyes.

Adam was thoroughly puzzled as well as irritated by this man's behavior. The more he regarded him, the more convinced he became that there was something mysterious and suggestive of evil in the situation.

"How long has—I believe I have not asked the patient's name."

"His name is Burbank," responded the nurse, watching the effect of his words with lynx-like attention.

Adam started, and forgot his question. His eyes fastened themselves upon his patient with a new, half-fearful concern. As he looked, the unnatural figure seemed to fascinate him. His expression changed from strained inquiry to dawning conviction, then a wave of sinister reflection swept both away, to be in turn replaced by an inscrutable, professional calm.

He became aware that the evil eyes opposite were still regarding him fixedly, and commanding his voice with an effort, asked quietly,

"How long has Mr. Burbank been in this comatose condition?"

"For several days now. He has had such spells off and on for some time," was the reply.

Adam laid fingers which slightly trembled upon the patient's pulse, and, seeking to gain an answering glance from the bleared eyes, asked slowly, "How are you feeling this morning, Mr. Burbank?"

At the sound of his name, the sick man began to whimper and mutter, and the bloated face took on a look of abject fear, while the swelled, helpless fingers picked nervously at the chair upon which they rested.

An expression of mingled pity and loathing swept over Adam's face; but he tried once more to further arouse the patient's drowsy perception.

"I am the doctor, Mr. Burbank. Are you feeling any pain?"

The word doctor seemed to strike a responsive chord somewhere in the man's dulled brain, for he lifted his heavy head and stared with half-conscious anxiety into Adam's face. But the feeble neck could not support the unusual weight. His head toppled awkwardly to one side, then sank again upon the laboring breast. But the poison-drugged senses were half aroused and the wretched man babbled and muttered feverishly, all the time quivering and shrinking as if in abject terror of every moving object.

Adam caught some of the broken sentences. "I can't tell anything about it. See, it isn't there—Not a sign—It's dead.—There's no one knows a thing—The bottom's a-swarmin'—a-swarmin' with snakes. Swallowed the old drunk—at a gulp. I never told you that—It's a lie."

The doctor listened with strained ears. Life had been busy with this man also. Retribution had overtaken him. The hidden sins in his breast had turned to stinging scorpions. His whole conscious existence had sunken into the hell of his evil memories.

Again Adam became aware of the cat-like eyes of the nurse noting his every movement and again he sought to break the spell with a simple and natural question.

"How long have you known Mr. Burbank?" he asked casually.

"Not quite so long as you have," was the low, meaning reply, and instantly the two men faced each other, subterfuge cast aside; one quivering with anxious expectancy, the other insolent with forbidden knowledge.

"Explain yourself," commanded Adam in a tense voice of restrained anger.

"We might as well git on to each other right away, Doctor," replied the man in a shuffling way, relapsing, in his excitement, into his old jargon of the street. "I followed, I reckon, in bein' the old man's tool. But I didn't do his dirty work for nothin'. It didn't take me long to git on to his tricks, nor to git the upper hand of him either. I've had the straight of that little affair up to the old farm, for a good many years, and I've put my information to good account now, I promise ye. I've held the leadin' strings over the old man this many a year. The end of the matter is, he's a goner now fer sure. There ain't but one thing more that I want. I made up my mind you could help me git it, an' I'm willin' to go halves fer your trouble."

Adam was dumfounded. He cast about in his mind for some plan by which he might become master of the unexpected situation, but nothing safe or adequate suggested itself to his confused thoughts.

"How did you get your information?" he ventured cautiously.

"He put me on to old Polly Halsey's track, thinkin' she was a-connivin' with you. Then what did I do but worm the whole story out of the old girl herself. How you ran away, and how the old man sneaked off down the passage himself and did up the young one. Then how she cleared out after a day or two——"

The man stopped, highly pleased with the memory of his own cleverness, but took the precaution to convince himself that Burbank, still muttering in his chair, was incapable of comprehending his remarks.

Adam took the further precaution to draw him aside before he asked quietly,

"How did you know where to find me?"

"Oh, I seen all about you in the paper. It's a blessed good thing the old man didn't get hold of it, or wild horses couldn't a-dragged him here where you was. He ain't much more 'fraid of the devil himself than he is of you. He's thought I was the old boy regular ever since he's bin sick, and there ain't nothin' in creation he's more afraid of 'n he is of me."

"What has become of Polly Halsey?" asked Adam, apparently following the man's story with keen relish.

"Oh, she's dead long ago. An' that's another o' my slick games. I made the old man think I'd drowned her in New-town Creek, 'n' that I did it a-follerin' his plans to git rid of her. I tell ye I've made him sweat, a-holdin' the two murders over him."

"Did Polly Halsey see Burbank murder the child?" was the next question Adam put,—awaiting the answer with breathless interest.

"No, I guess she didn't see him, but it's all the same. There wan't nobody else to do it."

Adam's eyes glittered strangely.

"How did Polly come to find Mr. Burbank?" he asked.

"Oh, she'd had her eyes peeled for him for several years. She was after money, of course. Burbank held out that her story was a lie, clean up to the time he was taken sick, but the first time he was out of his head he showed pretty plain he was guilty. He talked it all the time 'bout the baby's bein' dead, an' he couldn't find it, and Timosa was a-callin' for it, an' all that. After he once got flighty, and I told him he kept a-talkin' about it, he didn't dare to have any one near him but me, fear he'd let out somethin' that would set the hangman on his track."

The man's voluble tongue had stopped at last, and Adam drew a deep breath. He felt dizzy and confused.

"I don't understand what you want of me," he said, looking into the man's brutal, excited face.

" 'Tain't hard to see," was the low-voiced reply. "I knowed if you ever had any dealin's with old Burbank you must want to git even with him. He ain't got no relations as I've ever found out, and I didn't see no reason why you and I shouldn't have his money if we want it. Two might git what **one couldn't**, d'ye see? That's why I made up my mind to give ye a slice for your work."

Adam felt that he must get by himself to think, before he could deal with the singular situation in which he had become involved, so he said evasively :

"I've got to consider whether the thing can be done without danger. Meanwhile, this man must be brought to his senses, or nothing will ever be got out of him. I'll treat him, and you're to follow out my directions exactly. Can I rely on you for that?"

"Sure you can," was the reply. "But it won't do for you to be up to any games with me. Tim Tramner ain't one of the kind it's safe to fool with."

"And Adam Links isn't the man to fool with you," returned the doctor with a strange gleam in his eye. "I'll see you again early to-morrow morning, with a plan all settled."

Adam wrote his prescriptions and gave minute directions for the care of his patient.

Before he took his leave, he turned once more to the man in the chair and called him by name.

Burbank lifted his bleared yellow eyes and smiled a ghastly grin into his face.

"D——d heavy chances I've taken with that feller, I'll bet," growled Tim Tramner as the door closed after Adam. "I didn't mean to get into it so deep 'thout soundin' him a

little more. But 'Nothing venture nothing save,' and I guess Tim 'll be equal to him if worst comes to worst. I've handled them that's smarter. Here, you old poltroon, get to bed. If I've got myself into any scrape you'll take your share of the sweatin' for it. Darned good thing there ain't no one to care a flip what becomes of your hideous old carcass any way, an' I ain't no judge of a man if that solemn-faced fool of a doctor don't take that little p'int inter consideration 'fore he lets this chance go by."

With these words the self-constituted nurse hustled his his patient to bed.

Burbank whined and whimpered under Tim's brutal hand, and lay shivering with dread in the hideous grasp of his own disordered mind.

Adam left the hotel with a strange sense of the awfulness and the mystery of life. "'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will,'" he muttered to himself. The Burbank succession has ended with Burbank himself. Who could have believed that he would at last be thrown helpless and senseless into my hands, that it would be left to me to rescue him from the toils of a scoundrel like that? All these years I have laid such tangled mysteries of life to the devil, but surely the hand of the Lord is in it"—and Adam Links reverently bared his head under the spell of a new-born veneration.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TIM TRAMNER had taken heavy chances in thus exposing his secrets and his plans to a perfect stranger, but not so heavy as the casual observer might be led to suppose.

It was time to risk the last stakes, for the game was nearly up. He had bled Burbank to the last drop which he alone would be able to extort. Death would soon end his opportunity. He had practically lived on Burbank all these twenty years. If, by the help of Adam Links or any other man, he could preserve his living beyond the hour which would free his wretched master from his toils, he would risk defeat to do it.

Tim had not found Adam reassuring. It had been his conclusion that this Links must be a man something after his own type, else how had it come that he had been selected as Burbank's factotum. But the look on Adam's face, especially after he had told his story, was not one to invite confidence. The memory of it was still more disquieting, so he resolved to prepare for whatever might happen. He gathered up his small belongings, and took possession of what ready money Burbank had been obliged to entrust to him. Then he forced himself to sit down and quietly await the doctor's arrival.

True to his word, Adam appeared early at the bedside of his patient.

His face was pale but composed, as he opened the door and met the half-fearful, half-defiant eyes of Tim Tramner.

They nodded coldly to each other, but not a word was spoken till the physician had ministered to his patient.

There was little change in the condition of the sick man. The examination over, Adam lifted his eyes to the uneasy features of Tim's repellant face.

"You told me a good many strange things yesterday. On mature reflection, I have decided to tell you some things still stranger."

Tim tried to smile expectantly, but the doctor's grave, quiet tone unnerved him, and he only managed to respond with a sickly grin.

"In the first place," said Adam, "you have been laboring under a great mistake. There is not so much honor among thieves as some people profess to believe. Polly Halsey lied to you when she said that Burbank had murdered his grandson, for he lived to grow up. He is still living."

"The devil!" ejaculated Tim, his jaw dropping and an ashen color overspreading his face. "You're a-lyin' to me now!"

"I am speaking the solemn truth. It is not many months since I have seen him and talked with him."

"The devil!" exclaimed Tim again, his legs beginning to shake under him. "You won't be a-lettin' up the drop on the old man by tellin' him that stuff will ye?"

"Certainly I will, I'll not only tell it to him but prove it to him. Now the quicker you get out of here the better it will be for all hands."

"You must think you've got a softy to deal with, if ye think ye're goin' to git rid of me that easy," sneered Tim, his legs still shaking in spite of his blustering front. "Think

ye're goin' to make me believe that drivell just 'cause you say it? Ye ain't had much dealin' with fellers what know their bizness, I reckon."

"I've had dealings with all kinds," replied Adam coolly, fastening his keen glance upon the man's evil face. "I've made all necessary plans to take care of you in case you make any trouble. If we can't prove anything against you, we'll see that you're kept out of the way till all chance of carrying out your designs is gone by."

"You sneak!" hissed Tim, livid with rage. "I'm on to your tricks. You think you'll git me out of the way and git the old man's money yourself!"

"Providence permitting, his money will go to his grandson," said Adam calmly.

"Ye're a d——d fool, an' it's what the old man allus said," snarled Tim, grinding his teeth. "I'll make it hotter'n hell fer ye if you hang on to these tactics, an' I know how to do it, er my name ain't Tim Tramner."

"The game's up and time's up!" said Adam steadily, taking out his watch without moving his eyes from Tim's face. "I'll give you just two minutes to start. Consider yourself lucky to have a chance to escape. The whole of St. Augustine will stand behind my back. Defy me if you dare! Now go!"

Adam raised himself to his full height and squared his shoulders, as the gathering rage in Tim's face gave him the alarm.

"You d——d sneak!" burst from the baffled villain's lips as he sprang fiercely at Adam's throat.

But a well-aimed blow from the doctor's muscular arm sent him staggering into a far corner, where he slunk panting, glaring, and showing his dirty teeth like a beast at bay.

"I tell you, go!" cried Adam, in a tense ominous voice. "One more move like that and your chance is up!"

Tim gave the snarl of a cornered animal, and for a moment paused irresolute.

Adam's eyes never wavered in their piercing glance of command, and with a last look of sullen, treacherous hate, and a muttered threat, Tim sidled out of the room.

Adam turned the key in the door and sank into a chair, for the moment quite exhausted, then turned to look at his patient.

No impression had been made by the occurrence upon the dull senses of the half-unconscious man. He lay there with mouth open and eyes staring into vacancy. Now indeed, he was absolutely at Adam's mercy.

After quietly regarding him a moment, the doctor slipped out of the room, called to a chambermaid and sent her down to the office with a note.

Presently, an alert, intelligent-looking hospital-nurse made his appearance. To him Adam explained enough of the circumstances to put him on his guard, and giving him minute directions in regard to the care of his patient, finally took his leave.

After this, calls for the doctor came with their old persistent regularity, but the patient most carefully watched and tended was the death-stricken man at the hotel. Gradually the dropsical swelling was reduced, and Adam waited anxiously for the first sign of returning intelligence.

At last he was rewarded. As he opened the door of the sick-room one morning and glanced quickly toward the figure on the bed, his gaze was returned by a half-dazed look of anxious inquiry. He paused a second to collect himself, then moving to his patient's side asked quietly :

"How are you this morning, sir?"

The sick man started at his voice, and eyed him uneasily before he replied doubtfully,

"I—I think I am a little better."

"That is good news I'm sure, Mr. Burbank," said Adam, looking him full in the eye and noting the painful, furtive anxiety which had replaced the piercing, commanding gleam of former days. There was no doubting the identity of the man now. Twenty years had changed him greatly, but the eagle-like features, now that they had returned to their natural form and expression, were not to be mistaken.

As the doctor spoke the second time, the patient's mind seemed to clear, but with returning mental powers, the painful uncertainty and secret dread seemed to increase.

"How came you here?" he asked wonderingly.

"I was called by your nurse. You have been very ill," replied Adam.

"Who's that?" he next whispered fearfully, pointing with shaking finger at the nurse, who was busying himself in another part of room.

"That is your nurse. Have you not found him competent?" asked Adam.

Burbank nodded without speaking, but the troubled look deepened upon his face.

Presently he spoke again.

"Where's Tim?"

"He is gone," replied Adam. "Do you want him back?"

This time Burbank seemed at a loss how to reply, but finally shook his head half doubtfully.

After another moment of silent reflection, he beckoned Adam to come closer and whispered, while his eyes grew large with apprehension.

"Have I been out of my head much, Doctor?"

"For more than a week," was the reply.

"I—I suppose I talked a lot of nonsense?" he suggested anxiously,

"Yes, any amount of it," said Adam lightly. "People in your condition usually do. But you don't want to let that disturb you. You must try to sleep and rest. I'll say good-morning now and leave you in this capable fellow's care."

Adam was turning away, but Burbank plucked him by the sleeve.

"Is Tim coming back?" he murmured anxiously.

"No, you'll never see him again. He was no kind of a nurse for you, so we got rid of him on short notice."

Burbank still looked puzzled, but a wave of relief swept over his face and something of the old confidence came back to his voice as he said in a tone of dismissal,

"There's nothing more you can do for me this morning, I believe."

As Adam closed the door, Burbank raised himself feebly and beckoning the nurse to his side, asked uneasily,

"Who is that man?"

"Why, the doctor," responded the nurse soothingly.

"Doctor who?"

"Dr. Lane," was the reply given in accordance with Adam's directions.

Burbank fell back and closed his eyes.

Several days passed. Adam came and went, but nothing but the merest commonplaces were exchanged between doctor and patient. Good medicine, attention, and careful nursing had wrought great results in Burbank's condition, but Adam realized, what his patient had yet failed to comprehend, that the improvement was but temporary. No

human power could avail to stop the fatal progress of the disease.

Nowhere was the transient gain more marked than in the sick man's mental condition. As the hours went by, the old dominating spirit seemed to be reincarnated in the wasted frame. Though silent, his thoughts were apparently busy, and Adam met one morning a glance from his eyes so keen and penetrating that his own fell before it as of old.

The opportunity had come. Adam had not bided his time in vain. Now he would speak.

"You seem to regard me very curiously, Mr. Burbank," he said. "Has it entered your mind that you might have seen me before?"

The look of consternation which his question brought instantly to Burbank's face, convinced Adam that the sick man had been battling with the conviction which now forced itself upon him. But the restored spirit would make one more desperate fight for supremacy. He swept Adam's face with a cold, steady gaze, and replied indifferently,

"I have regarded you as the doctor, and this morning have the intention of relieving you from further duties in my case."

"Indeed!" replied Adam, seeking to control his voice. "In what part of my treatment have I failed to meet your approval?"

"I am not fond of being treated by the medical fraternity and do not need you longer. I haven't felt better for weeks. I consider myself entirely convalescent, and will soon be about."

"Thanks to the skill of your old enemy!" replied Adam, with a meaning look into the eyes of the man who considered him with such studied indifference.

The sick man's face seemed to shrink under his gaze, and the firm-set lips, turning deathly pale, dropped weakly apart.

"What do you mean by that?" he muttered, after a moment of questioning silence and suspense.

"You know me, Mr. Burbank," replied Adam quietly. "It is not necessary to make an explanation."

Burbank's face worked convulsively, and his shaking hand wandered nervously over the bed, as if in vain search of some weapon with which to annihilate so daring an enemy.

Adam waited a moment, and then said calmly, "Your secret and Tim's is also mine now, Mr. Burbank."

The face on the bed slowly gathered an expression of dread and murderous hate which fairly made Adam quail.

"So you got rid of Tim to work your own little game," he glowered. "Now what do you want of me?" And he made an imperative motion that the nurse should be sent from the room.

But Adam shook his head.

"It is well to have a witness, Mr. Burbank," he said. "Your evil influence has followed me long enough, I propose now to have my revenge."

"Curse you, go on!" muttered Burbank, as Adam paused.

"As long as you live, I shall let you alone. Indeed, I will protect your secret and take care of you, if necessary. This for the early kindness you showed me. After your death, I must have recompense for the miseries I have endured at your hands."

"You have my heartfelt gratitude!" sneered Burbank. "Kindly proceed! What else?"

"Nothing else, except that you must will your property at my dictation."

"Ah, you murderous devil!" cried Burbank, shaking with

impotent fury. "Will my property to you, here on a sick bed, and give you a chance to poison me afterward! Do you take me for a fool?"

"You are under the protection of this witness," said Adam, nodding his head in the direction of the nurse. "There will also be the lawyer. After the will is drawn up, you have only to speak the word, and you shall never see my face again, but not a moment's peace shall be yours until that is done."

"You are all a pack of devils in collusion," faltered Burbank, his courage eking away and leaving only a ghastly, cringing fear in its place.

"Mr. Burbank," said Adam quietly, "it would be impossible to convince a man like you of the honest intentions of an enemy. I have seen the day when I cursed and hated you, but that day is past. I mean you no harm, body or soul, but justice at your hands I will have. I not only ask it, but demand it. Now what is your decision?"

He received no answer at first, and as he watched the wretched man's torturing struggle with fear and apprehension, a feeling of pity almost unnerved him; but he did not yield.

With the keenness of a professional eye, he saw that the trying ordeal was fast wasting the strength of the dying man, and it seemed as though his anxious hope for justice would yet be frustrated.

His heart leaped, therefore, when at last Burbank turned his drawn, sullen face upon the pillow and said:

"I'm tired of life. You haven't as much of a revenge as you think. Don't flatter yourself I cannot see through your cursed purpose, but I'm ready to sign my death-warrant. Get your lawyer."

Adam rose and sent hastily for his trusted acquaintance, the lawyer.

When he turned again to his patient and saw that he was exhausted and breathing heavily, he stirred quickly a restoring drug and bade him drink.

Burbank's eyes flew open as the cold rim of the glass touched his lips, and a look of horror blanched his shrinking features, but he swallowed the potion with a gasp, and said not a word.

Adam laid his fingers upon his patient's pulse, and the pity in his heart made their pressure kind, but the feebly pulsing wrist shuddered under his touch.

The messenger soon returned with the lawyer. Adam met him in the adjoining room, and, after a hurried consultation, led him to the patient's bedside. The reviving drug had had its effect, and Burbank was again calm and steady.

The lawyer sat down to his work. "Well, Mr. Burbank, I am ready. I will and bequeath to——"

"Adam Links," said the sick man huskily.

"Stop" interrupted Adam, "you were to make your will at my dictation."

"Here, you lawyer and you nurse!" cried Burbank in a quivering voice, "if you have a spark of honor in your souls, witness that this man is extorting this bequest under threat. But what a fool I am! You are all scoundrels, and all in conspiracy. I am a helpless slave among you. Now, thief, villain, what will you have me say? Repeat it to me, strict to the letter!"

"Very well!" and Adam's voice rang with a strange exultation.

"I will and bequeath to my grandson, Wilton Bearall Carlyle——"

Burbank looked up at him in stupid wonder.

"What kind of a fool are you making of me?" he muttered.

"Mr. Burbank," said Adam solemnly. "I am making, I hope, a free and honest man of you once more."

"You must be mad," faltered Burbank. "I have no grandson."

"You are wrong," replied Adam, his voice trembling with long-suppressed emotion and excitement. "You have a grandson, the child you plotted with me to destroy. That night's work has made life almost a curse to both of us. I have regained peace at last, now take yours at my hands!"

Burbank stared wildly into Adam's face as though unable to comprehend his words. His lip quivered and his hands twitched convulsively.

"Your grandson is living, I tell you," repeated Adam. "Timosa's child is a man to-day. It is to him you are to will your property, and seek to right the shameful wrong that you have done!"

"Did you take the child? Did you lie to me?" cried Burbank, clutching at the doctor's arm.

"No, miserable man!" was the stern reply. "I have suffered tortures thinking that the babe died under my hand, but it was that polluted wretch, Polly Halsey, who stole the child for her own villainous purposes."

"Can you prove it? Are you sure?" gasped the sick man, raising himself with new strength upon his pillows, and gazing into Adam's face with a strained hungering for the truth.

"Yes, I can prove it, and bring the young man here, no doubt, if there is time."

"No, no, I don't want to see him!" faltered Burbank, sinking back exhausted. "The old witch had her will! I can't believe it, I can't believe it, after all these years!"

"You suffered your just deserts!" said Adam sternly.

"What were you but a murderer after all? No wonder you feared me. I have thirsted for revenge; now I ask only justice. Do you hesitate longer to bequeath your property to your grandson?"

"What is he to you?" asked the sick man suspiciously.

Adam frowned and said cuttingly,

"It would be impossible for you to believe in a living man again. No wonder. A guilty heart makes a fit hot-bed for suspicions. Perhaps the whole story will help you to credit my words."

So Adam told, as briefly as possible, the strange story of the intervening years.

Burbank listened with eager attention. His haggard eyes following with changing expression the various phases of the tale. Once he covered his face with his hand and groaned aloud, but to the most, he listened unresponsive.

They sat for a moment in silence when the story was done. A strange impulse of sympathy or admiration seemed to move the lawyer, for he reached out and shook the doctor solemnly by the hand.

"I can trust you with all this?" asked Adam quietly.

"With all my heart and my honor!" was the reply.

"Mr. Burbank, do you believe what I have told you?" demanded Adam.

"I accept your statement for the present. The future will give opportunity for proofs," was the cautious response.

"Are you ready to proceed with the will, Mr. Burbank?" asked the lawyer.

Burbank made a sign of assent. The interrupted work was resumed, and the document was soon complete. "Wilton Bearall Carlyle, son of my daughter Timosa Burbank Carlyle," was made sole legatee of the Burbank possessions.

Before Adam left, the sick man beckoned him to the bed.

"To-morrow, I shall have something to say to you. I must husband my strength. I have more to live for than I have had for twenty years. I believe I owe it to you that I am on the mend. To-morrow I shall have something to say to you."

"Very well, Mr. Burbank!" replied Adam, but shook his head as he turned away.

The next morning found the patient in a wild delirium. From this condition, he sank into a state of lethargy. Two days afterwards, without regaining consciousness, he died.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER Mr. Burbank's death, two letters were dispatched to the North. They bore addresses which Adam had already carefully convinced himself were the correct ones. One of these epistles was from the office of the lawyer who had drawn up the dying man's will. It was addressed to Wilton Bearall, No. — Nassau Street. The other was from the book-lined library in the villa and bore the oft-inscribed name of Winona de Monteano.

The first one, we readily guess, contained the formal announcement of the ample fortune left to Wilton Bearall by his grandfather, D. A. Burbank. The other read as follows :—

“DEAR WINONA :—

“It is hard to realize that I am here—at my old study table—and about to pen you another letter. When I think of my tortured mind, my breaking heart, my dark forebodings as I sat here writing that last letter—the very last, as I supposed—I can scarcely believe in my own identity. Then, I was plunging into an awful river of mental oblivion—dark, mysterious, fathomless. All the irresistible powers of a cruel destiny were closing in behind me like a black cloud of hideous, relentless faces. In my delirious moments, I beheld a pandemonium of hellish forms thrusting me with their ghastly arms to the awful brink. Yet even then, struggling through it all, there was one bright ray, one tender, sustaining thought—the memory of my child-friend, Winona.

"As I write it, I look up and the sun is pouring in at my eastern window—the beautiful sun—God's sun. It floods the top of the table, and turns the paper under my hand to dazzling whiteness. Some artist has said, 'There is no object so hideous that it will not become beautiful under an intense, white light.' The intense white light of gratitude has swept across my life, Winona—and it has become beautiful to live, beautiful to hope, beautiful to love. It all comes back to me like a dream, that plunging into the fierce, angry flood from the opposite bank, for I am emerging on a sun-flooded shore. The warmth and peace of returning life greet me, and the buds of promise seem about to burst into bloom.

"Forgive me for writing thus in what seems to you exaggerated figure. You cannot begin to imagine what it is to be born from such a death unto life. Then, you know that savages speak in Nature's language, and, it seems to me that I have been something of a savage in my thoughts, in my life, even in my birth.

"But enough of myself. I have so much to say to you, I scarcely know where to begin. After that meeting with Wilton Bearall, with all its wonderful, its almost incomprehensible revelations, I could not write to you. It was only just, that he should tell you first. How strange it must have seemed to you that the little black-eyed, curly-headed boy, of whom you were so fond even when a little girl, should have turned out to be your own brother, a child of the same mother.

"Then for me to learn that the old sin which had hung over my life like a pall, was only a thing born of my fears and my own imagination—Ah, it was like a reprieve for the doomed. Finally there were other things which blasted my

joy, so that Wilton Bearall and I parted in horror and fear of each other. But I cannot know how much of those last words between us is familiar to you, so I will not venture to say more. Before I felt that I might write to you concerning both yourself and him, I found that the ghastly horror of insanity was creeping over me, and I refrained from inflicting you with anything but that last letter which I penned immediately after the fateful meeting.

"It has been my great privilege to do for your brother what I hope will prove to be a great service. His grandfather, D. A. Burbank, whose story and whose connection with my own life-history, you have doubtless already learned, died under my care. It was my good fortune to persuade him to will his large property, where it rightfully belonged, to your brother, and his grandson. I did not tell him about you, Winona, I thought if your father and mother had left him in ignorance of your existence, fearing to trust you to a protection which had brought such suffering into your mother's life, I would also leave him in ignorance. But he owed it to your brother whose life he plotted against, and whose whole existence, but for a kind Providence, would have been one filled with misery like my own, to make what little reparation he could. I also owed it to the young man to make what reparation possible, and I cannot be thankful enough that it fell into my power to use my influence at the right time.

"Winona, have you forgiven me; do you forgive me for my part in your brother's troubles, both then and later? How does he feel toward me? Have the strange revelations of his life-history and late-discovered relationships become sanctioned facts in his mind? I hope and trust that it may be so.

"I knew but little of either Wilton's father or yours, but the gentle, refined, beautiful, but sad mother who bore you both, will always remain a vision of sweetest womanhood in my memory. The belief that I had wronged her was the sharpest pang in those long years of delusion and consequent misery.

"I have written a long letter and yet I have said nothing of what I want to say.

At the same time that this letter goes to you, the information of the Burbank legacy will go to your brother. Doubtless, as you are reading this, he will be trying to comprehend his unexpected good fortune. May he live to enjoy it to the utmost!

"I don't know what you will think or say when I add that I intend to follow this letter in person. I have kept away from you all these years, but my heart was bowed down in the dust, falsely surmising that I was a guilty, blood-stained man. Humbled in my own soul, I dared not go to you, fearing the repulse of a friendship on which my whole soul-life seemed to hang. But I shall delay no longer! Life seems to offer great possibilities to me now, after those miraculous rescues first from blood-guiltiness then from insanity. Even the Burbank domination, which commenced in meaning crime, and followed me with sad fatalities so many years, has turned to an aspect of reparation and beneficence.

"I have been so long unused to hope that I tremble lest, like a man parched with thirst, I drink too deeply for my good. Yet, like him, drink this time I must. So, Winona, I hope to see you soon—and the hope is like wine to my blood, and warmth to my long-chilled heart.

"Ever devotedly yours,

"ADAM LINKS."

We will only follow Adam long enough to try to comprehend the unusual state of mind to which he had lent himself.

When a man suddenly emerges from the gloom into a brilliant, untempered light, it is sometimes long before he can see objects in their proper form and relation. The greater the gloom, the deeper the sun-blindness, the longer the deprivation, the more unreal the light.

Adam did not reason much over his new outlook on life. He simply accepted it as it was, and troubled himself little about what might be its false views or distorted relations.

He, of course, took it for granted that Wilton and Winona had by this time become reconciled to the ties of consanguinity. That there might be another suitor in the field, he did not stop to consider, or, if he did, had deemed it improbable. The question of disparity in ages he had also dismissed with the reflection that there are many happy marriages made under similar conditions.

All these things the once conservative, self-disparaging man put out of his mind and out of his way, while he lived rapturously happy in the mere hope of seeing again in bodily form the ideal he had cherished through all the long years of his loneliness.

If he had needed anything to hold his heart true and unswerving to his first and only acknowledged love, the photograph left by Wilton had been that talisman. But he had not needed even this.

CHAPTER XXX.

WINONA and Belle were both reading under the same gaslight in the library of their home.

This would have been an unprecedented sight a few months previous, but it was no uncommon thing now. The relations between the two girls had been, to all outward appearances, harmonious, since Belle had so unexpectedly advocated Winona's remaining a member of the household.

A circumstance which had greatly tended to foster a certain degree of intimacy between them was Mrs. Stillwater's absence from home. Less than two months after the death of her husband, the widow had been suddenly called to the bedside of a dying sister living in California. The sisters, who had not seen each other for years, met only to part, for the invalid lingered but a few hours after Mrs. Stillwater's arrival.

The illness and death of her husband, followed so closely by the sudden death of her sister, told severely on a constitution never very strong, and Mrs. Stillwater had not yet been able to take the long journey home. Heart trouble was the inheritance of her family, and, though the minister's wife had never annoyed any one with her physical ailments, this severe attack, following the mental strain she had gone through, though more alarming, was by no means the first she had experienced.

Belle had received a letter from her mother stating that

she had taken the advice of her physician to remain until she was stronger and the weather east more settled.

So the two girls had been thrown almost necessarily upon each other's society, and, though far from sharing confidences, they were no longer uncomfortable together.

As they sat there in the early evening, quietly reading, the welcome whistle of the postman was heard at the door, causing both girls to jump up in eager expectancy.

Each received a letter and carried it back to be read in the clearer light.

Belle's was evidently very short, for after a rapid perusal of the contents, she laid it upon the table with a hand which slightly trembled in the act, and without turning her head, said slowly, "Uncle writes that mother is not so well."

Surprised that Winona made no reply to so serious a communication, Belle turned to look at her.

She heeded neither voice nor look, she was devouring the closely written sheet with a strange look of gathering horror upon her face. Presently the letter began to tremble violently between her fingers, she paused with a gasp and pressing her hands against her heart, walked wildly across the room and back again, unconscious of Belle's greedily intense gaze. Then she began to read the remaining sheets, following the words with eyes that grew more strained and staring with every line. The last word was reached. "Belle, Belle," burst from her blanched lips with a bitter cry, "something awful has happened! He is my brother! Wilton is my own brother! O my God! what does it all mean?"

Belle stood in the middle of the floor dumb with amazement, and stared at the door through which Winona had fled with a choking moan of anguish.

At first something like a wave of pity passed over her thin, colorless features, then she drew a short, quick sigh and sat down.

The letter from her uncle was forgotten now, and picking up a thin paper-cutter she tapped it lightly and reflectively upon the smooth top of the table saying softly to herself,

"Well, it has come at last. She knows now what it is to feel. The lesson has come late—but it is none the less poignant for that."

She sat there for a long time, wondering how the news had come to her, consumed with a longing to see the letter which had brought such consternation. Could Wilton have decided at last to break his long silence and confess the dreadful secret? But then—she seemed so sure. He would not have written that way. He would have left it as an open question to be referred, as a last resort, to her mother. Belle thought of Dr. Links, but dismissed the thought as impossible.

In the midst of her reverie, she heard the door-bell ring, and knew that Wilton had arrived at the usual hour to spend the evening with his betrothed.

The maid showed him into the reception-room, and Belle waited, listening.

It was some moments before she heard slow, halting footsteps upon the stairs. She thought how Winona had been wont to trip lightly down, impatient for the meeting with her lover, while she, loving him as long and as well, sat there alone, unsought and forgotten. At the reflection a grim smile passed furtively over her features.

She took a cruel pleasure in imagining that meeting now, with this awful thing which had suddenly sprung up between them—the more awful because he had known it all along.

She loved Wilton, but she would not spare him now if she could. She wanted him to writhe with the consciousness of his own shame and cowardice as she had writhed in the throes of her jealousy and the consciousness of the stolen letter. Ah! the letter! What if she had delivered it up and exposed her shame! What a fool she would have been! Here was the whole secret revealed—and she was safe.

She heard the door open and close. She sprang to her feet and stood listening with strained attitude and bated breath, as if she would hear the pitiful heart-throbs behind that close-shut door.

Wilton sat waiting. His dark eyes were troubled and sad. A letter containing good news was safe in his pocket—but was it good news? What should he do with this bequest from a grandfather whom he had never dared to speak of to Winona. It seemed as though all his joys were to be turned to sorrows, all his benefits to banes. Why does she linger so upon the stairs! Oh! if only his conscience were as clean as it once was, how he could welcome her—"Why!—For God's sake, Winona! why do you look so strangely at me? What has happened?"

She moved her white lips but did not speak. Putting out her slender hand she pushed him gently back, then walking dizzily to a distant corner of the room, dropped into a low chair and covered her face with her hands.

For a second Wilton stood looking at her, an awful fear tugging at his heart-strings. Then a smothered groan from the bowed head pierced him to the heart, and striding across the floor he fell on his knees by her side, saying tenderly, "Nona, my darling, my love, look at me!"

She raised her haggard eyes and looked at him—looked with a hopeless stricken gaze that made him cry in a per-

fect agony of fear, "For God's sake, Winona! will you speak to me! You drive me mad!"

He took her hand and drew it to his lips with tender force, but she shrank from the caress, and he felt her tremble from head to foot. Still she made no answer, save that a dry sob escaped from her colorless lips.

He could bear it no longer. The awful truth was forcing itself upon him. He read it in her face. She knew! Through man or devil she had found it out! She had believed the lie!—the awful lie!

Rising to his feet in a transport of grief and defiance, he caught her to his breast. What was her feeble strength against his might, against the right of his love. He kissed the cold, feeble fingers that pushed him back, he lifted her in his arms and cried into her swooning ears,

"You are mine—mine! O God, *mine!* Can you hear, my darling! Can you understand! mine, mine!"

With a low moan her head fell helpless against his breast and her arms dropped heavily by her sides. She had fainted.

Laying her upon a sofa, he hastily loosened the ribbon about her throat and chafed her brow and wrists, all the while sobbing in a tearless, hysterical abandonment of grief.

In a moment she opened her eyes and looked up at him with a dim, half-conscious gaze. He drew her head to his breast and held it there, choking down the paroxysms of sobs in his throat. For an instant she rested quietly as if all were well, then her eyes suddenly flew open with that haunted look once more struggling in their depths.

She made a feeble motion to draw away from him, but finding her strength unequal said with pitiful, quivering lips,

"Please, Wilton, lay me back upon the sofa."

Oh if she had only commanded him! But the weak appeal

was stronger than any law, and feeling that he was putting her away from him forever, he silently obeyed.

She closed her eyes, and for a moment there was stillness in the room, through which Wilton heard the hard stifled beating of his heart.

Then she raised herself, and drawing a letter from the broad ribbon of her belt, she handed it to him without a word.

"Am I to read it, Winona?" he faltered.

She bowed her head.

"O, Winona, whatever it is, it cannot, it shall not, separate us. How can you push me from you with that poor little weak hand of yours? I am all you have in the world! You cannot put me away from you now! I cannot read it, Winona! Tell it to me, with your hand in mine!"

She shook her head.

"You must read!—O, Wilton!"

He would have stifled the cry with his lips, but with a frightened look she drew hastily back.

Without another word he took the letter. Half-way through, he faltered and turned an agonized look back at the white face, but she motioned him to go on, and he forced himself to finish.

As the last words burned into his consciousness he dropped the letter from his fingers as though it had been a thing unclean. He rose and turned a face toward Winona that burned with a dull red glow. Fierce fire smouldered in his eyes, and he straightened himself up, folded his arms upon his breast and began to pace back and forth across the floor.

Winona was aroused from her dull apathy. She looked at him wonderingly. At sight of his dignity and his anger something like a faint hope glimmered in her heart. She

had expected to see fear, shame, and remorse. She felt that it would be the last cruel blow to see her lover crushed with shame in her presence. But anger—! He did not even ask her forgiveness for his deception. O, could it be possible she had nothing to forgive!

He paused in front of her and asked sternly: "Do you believe all this?"

"O, Wilton!" she replied. "God knows I should be glad to find it all false—false! You knew it, Wilton, why did you keep it from me?"

"I told you, Winona. I wrote it all to you in that letter which was lost! Then I would not tell you—to blast your peace and mine. My heart told me it was false! How dare that doctor assert what he does not know, but only believes. How dare he come between us? Do you not see? Do you not understand? He loves you, Winona—he loves you! He believes to be true that which ministers to his hope, to the desire of his life!—so do I. I believe to be true and pure and right and just that which has become a part of my life, that which could not have flowed in such an unnatural channel as brother to sister. I believed in my love for you, Winona, and therefore I kept silent. Winona, look at me! Am I your brother? What does your heart say? What, does love say? Ah! I see it in your face! In the eyes of ordinary canons of right and wrong, I have been weak and cowardly, and deceitful. I ought to stand before you crushed, ashamed, conscience-stricken, overwhelmed. But I cannot, Winona, I will not. The secret has weighed upon my soul. I have been ashamed. I have spent sleepless nights and days of fearful anxiety. I have had an awful gladness in other men's woe, knowing that, through their sorrows, my secret was safe. But to-night I cannot be sorry

I cannot despair. I may be crazy—I think I am! But something in me shouts an everlasting No! It beats in my heart, it courses through my veins, it drums in my ears. I can think of only one thing else—that mad doctor with his awful eyes, his uncanny, wailing laugh, and his consuming love for you who are mine—mine forever!”

The words had poured out in a torrent. He had not taken his eyes from Winona's, and they seemed to draw her with irresistible power to himself. She rose dizzily to her feet and, with the last words which he spoke, her trembling hands dropped into his outstretched to meet them. They stood there for one moment, spellbound, afraid of each other, afraid of themselves yet powerless in the grasp of that mysterious attraction which seemed to emanate from an unknown source and bind them with a tie indescribable.

As they stood looking in each other's eyes, the mesmerizing power of his melted away. Some earth-born consciousness of the rude practical force of daily life crept in. The moment of exaltation was gone. She dropped her eyes and, trembling, drew away her hands. A choking sensation was in his throat. He drew his hand slowly across his eyes as though he would sweep away a strange dullness gathering there. He leaned heavily against the wall and murmured, “Winona, a mortal faintness is seizing me. I must get out into the air! Winona—Come—Good-bye.”

She made one step into his outstretched arms, then, with a low cry of anguish, turned and fled sobbing from the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BELLE had heard nothing. She dared not creep to the door to listen, and from her position no sound brought the craved relief to her strained senses.

She had listened, waited, and wondered till her head throbbed and every nerve tingled.

Suddenly she was startled by the door-bell. Wondering who could have called at such a late hour, she directed the maid to show the visitor into the library. She did not mean that anything should disturb that disclosure which her jealous heart had so long desired.

She heard a deep voice inquiring for Winona de Monteano, and the maid's reply that she was at present engaged. There was a moment of hesitation, a few low-spoken words, and then Belle stepped hurriedly back, as the door was pushed wide open and the maid announced "Dr. Adam Links, of St. Augustine."

She stared at him in amazement, unable to collect herself.

"This is Miss Stillwater, I presume," said the caller, coming to her rescue. "You will hardly remember me. I must ask your pardon for calling at this untimely hour, but I have just arrived. The train was late. I had so long anticipated being here this evening, I could not quite resist the temptation to come in and introduce myself, if I only stayed a few moments. Winona received my letter this evening, I suppose?"

"I don't know, I am sure! Yes, I think she must have!" gasped Belle, still staring. "Pray, have a chair. I hope you will pardon me, Dr. Links. You quite startled me. I thought you were ill. I—I——"

"Yes, I have been ill, indeed, but I have entirely recovered. I thought you must know. I took it for granted that most of my northern friends would have heard by this time. My letter explained. You say Winona received it?" he asked, his face clouding anxiously.

The truth flashed into Belle's mind. What would she not give to know exactly what was in that letter! "Yes, I believe she did," she replied cautiously, but it only came about an hour and a half ago. I have not seen her since."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the doctor, with visible relief, "I thought it would arrive sooner; but I believe all the trains have been delayed to-day. I trust your parents are well."

"My father died several months ago. My mother is in California, and ill," replied Belle quietly.

"Pardon my question," said Adam regretfully, "I have been shut out from the world so long that I have still much to learn of what has transpired during my absence."

"Your mistake was quite pardonable, I am sure," replied Belle stiffly, racking her brain for the proper question to draw out the secret of his unexpected appearance.

"I will not detain you longer," said Adam rising, "unless you think it would be possible for me to see Winona a few moments."

"Well," replied Belle, also rising, "it may be that you can see her, presently, if you care to wait. The fact is, her approaching marriage engages a great deal of her attention, just now. Her lover is with her this evening,"—hesitating with pretended embarrassment, but furtively

watching the effect of her words from between narrowing eyelids.

A swift pallor overspread Adam's face.

"Her lover!"

"Oh! I supposed you knew," explained Belle. "She has been engaged to a young lawyer for a long time. Wilton Bearall, an old friend and playmate. I presume their marriage is not far off."

Adam staggered as though she had struck him a blow, and gazed at her in mute rigid silence.

The pause was painful. Belle was grasping for some suitable word, when the drawing-room door opened and she heard Wilton's step in the hall.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "Mr. Bearall is just going out. Winona will be at liberty now."

With a look of dumb passion which Belle never forgot, Adam Links strode past her and down the hall. The door had just clicked behind Wilton's footsteps, when it was fiercely swung open and Dr. Links also disappeared.

Wilton had taken one dizzy step into the night when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a deep, hard voice hissed in his ear, "Stop!"

He turned with a start, to face a stern figure towering over him from the step above.

"Unhand me!" he cried, with smothered passion, striking the detaining hand from his shoulder.

"Presently," was the low, masterful response, while a grip like iron was fastened upon his arm and he was half-dragged, half-pushed down the steps and under the nearest gaslight.

"Wilton Bearall Carlyle, do you know me?" cried a fierce voice close to his ear, while a powerful hand flung him loose from its grasp, and a pair of glowing eyes confronted him.

Wilton, choking with the spasm of wild fury in his heart, cried savagely, "Know you! Know you! By heaven I know you better than you think!" and sprang upon him.

Adam received the impetuous onslaught with a front like iron. He caught the young man's hands and held them helpless above his head, receiving the weight of his falling body on his own panting breast.

Wilton struggled to recover himself, but was savagely pushed back at arm's length and again released.

He stood there panting. The long strain was telling keenly. He drew his hand across his eyes with a half groan.

"Ah, you suffer!" cried Adam hoarsely, holding him sternly under his burning gaze. "Some will choose suffering for right, others will suffer when right conquers!"

"And others will cause suffering for their own secret ends," broke in Wilton with a quivering voice.

"You dare to say that? Dastard!—You, holding such a secret—from her. You deceiver! You shameless, unnatural brother! You—pretending to suffer! By Heaven, I might better have murdered in truth, since such as you escaped to bring crime into her life! You thought I was worse than dead, you coward, you knave! But I have come back to life. I have had a new birth, for this—for this! I will protect her! I will save her! I will love her with a love——"

"Stop!" cried Wilton, springing upon him again. "Prove the ties of blood! Prove the hideous lie or the curse of blasted love be on you. You will protect her! You will save her! You will love her—you—*you*! Where were you when she crept falteringly down to face her blasted hopes? Where were you when her trembling feet sank under her and she fell death-like across my breast? Where were you when the moan of agony broke from her quivering

lips? You, with your professions of protection and love lurked in the letter that blighted her life too. It's too late for vengeance! do you think you can torture me when I remember *her* face, *her* cry? When I remember my own craven folly? I was a coward!—a coward to trust love rather than untried evidence! But Heaven hearing me, I would rather be a coward, and a knave, than you!”

With a hoarse, bitter cry, Adam pushed the young man violently from him and fled into the darkness. Wilton, half swooning, was dimly conscious of a choking, sobbing laugh ringing in his ears.

When Belle saw the door close behind Adam Links, she stood one moment in mute, anxious dismay. Then she flew back to the library, turned out the gas and sprang to the window.

In a moment her eyes had accustomed themselves to the dimmer light, and her heart stood still as she watched the glowering figures under the lamp-post. Twice she almost screamed outright as the two men closed in fierce passion. But she choked back the cry and watched. She saw the older man's last blind thrust before he disappeared in the darkness. She saw Wilton strike heavily against the lamp-post, and she saw, with a fierce pang at her heart, that he sank helpless upon the pavement.

With a suppressed cry she sprang to the door and down the steps. In a moment she was kneeling by his side. His head lay upon her breast, and even then the touch of it made her quiver with an awful joy.

She loosened his collar, she chafed his hands, she called him by name,—and she hardly knew her own voice for the pleading tenderness in it.

Slowly he opened his eyes,—those beautiful dark eyes that had gone quivering into her heart that day so long ago.—In the pale light they seemed to look love into hers, and she trembled. Then they closed, and he lay quiet for a moment as if at peace. But when he looked up again he tried to rise and muttered faintly, “Oh, is it you, Belle? I thought it was Winona. Come, you must go in. It is cold. How came I here? What has happened to my head, and he raised his hand to his head from which the blood was slowly trickling over his cheek. Oh! I remember. It is of no consequence. Don’t mind me. I must go home now!”

But Belle clung to his hand. “You must come in first and let me dress your head. I saw it all from the window. Why should you and that man seek to injure each other?”—and her heart leaped in anxiety for his answer.

But he said wearily, “Not now, Belle! Let me go!—No, I will go with you,” and he suffered her to lead him into the house, bring water and sponge, and bathe the blood from his head with a tenderness of touch he would not have believed possible in her.

Not a word was spoken as she ministered to him, but when she finished, he looked up into her colorless face with eyes that were dim and pleading as he said slowly,

“Belle, you have not always felt kindly toward me, toward us, but of late you have been different. To-night, I find that I never knew you. You have been more than kind to me. You have shown more than a sister’s tenderness and thoughtfulness. I want to make a great demand upon you before I go, Belle. I believe you know as well as any living person the truth of Winona’s story. I believe you have been your mother’s confidante. Belle, both Winona and I know of your poor father’s bitterly repented mistakes. But we

have nothing but the most forgiving spirit toward all that is past and gone. We know that to cover those first mistakes and misfortunes there were some things told which we cannot believe compatible with truth. Belle, we are in trouble. For Winona's sake,—for mine, can you put aside all other considerations but those of truth, and answer me once and for all, if you know the truth, is Winona the true and legitimate child of Leon and Timosa de Monteano, or is she not?"

Belle grasped for some loophole whereby she might save herself. For a moment everything grew dark about her. She looked away, but Wilton's intense, glowing eyes drew her back. A fierce anguish of hope and despair struggled in her breast, then a spirit that braves all for love's desire took possession of her. She forced her eyes to look steadily and calmly into his and said firmly, "Winona is the true and legitimate child of Leon and Timosa de Monteano."

Wilton looked at her with awful, compelling eyes. Springing to his feet, he grasped her hand and holding it above her head cried sternly, "Swear!"

"I swear!" she said, gazing at him with fascinated fear.

"Before God!"

"Before God," she repeated, with a steady voice but blanched lips.

He dropped her hand heavily. It fell unheeded at her side, while she seemed unable to draw her fixed gaze from his face.

"Tell Winona," he whispered huskily, and was gone.

A cold draught swept down the long hall as the outer door opened and shut. The letter from her uncle, which she had left lying open upon the table, fluttered rustling to the floor. Belle buried her face in her hands and shivered.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ADAM spent the night in a bitter struggle with his tortured heart.

Reason told him that all interest in Winona de Monteano must now come to an end, but a fierce, unconquerable yearning to see her face beat down every new argument of judgment, and reigned supreme.

"Do you think she will welcome you to her presence, now that you have come like a demon of destruction between her lover and herself?" demanded Reason impatiently.

"But I would save her from his wickedness, and I have loved her so long, so long!" cried the pleading voice within.

"What thought will she give to you?" argued Reason remorselessly. "Her eyes are blinded by scalding tears that flow through you. Go, but go prepared to meet repulse."

And Adam went. He could not take that dreary journey home with such an uncertainty hanging over him. Fate might once more be kind.

Though the morning hours had seemed like ages, it was still early when he found himself near the house. All looked so deserted that he hesitated to ring the bell. He wished that he had bridled his impatience for yet another hour, and, still undecided what to do, he crossed to the opposite side of the street and glanced up at the curtained windows.

As if in answer to his gaze, an unseen hand touched the heavy shade and it rolled swiftly to the top of the sash. A slender, girlish figure stood revealed. A loose morning gown fell softly about her, rich golden hair, still undressed, clung about her delicate face.

It was *the* face, and Adam's heart gave a throb of joy mingled with sharp pain.

For an instant her eyes were uplifted, following the movement of the gliding shade, then her face was pressed close to the window and a long gaze swept the length of the quiet street. No light of recognition changed the still sadness of her face as the returning eyes fell upon him. Instead, a white hand was quickly lifted and drew the thick curtain once more between herself and him. She did not know him. He was nothing to her except one of the prying world from which she must hide her grief.

It seemed to Adam that the restored sunshine of his life faded with her vanishing figure. He could not,—he would not see her go! He sprang across the street,—up the steps,—nothing could restrain him now. Surely, surely the love of such a boy was nothing to his fierce, agonizing heart-hunger! Had he not been too long a fool, a coward! It had all been his own fault. He had not let her know. She could not turn him away,—the old protector and friend with the long-famished heart.

The door opened. His own voice sounded strange to him as he gave his name to the maid, and asked for Winona.

She was gone strangely long. Adam's heart had time to measure the slender chances of his hope, and despair settled over him like a sullen cloud.

At last she returned, bringing with her a little note.

Adam received it with a trembling hand and read :—

“DEAR FRIEND.

“The letter you sent reached me last evening. You cannot realize, because you do not know the circumstances, what a cruel blow your innocent and well-meant letter proved to my ignorance. If you could realize, you would forgive me this seemingly unpardonable message which begs you to leave me. Sometime I may be able to explain.

“Yours faithfully,

“WINONA.”

Adam read it silently. A moment more and he was again dragging his heavy feet along the street.

The morning hours at length brought to Winona a message from Wilton :

“I could not trust myself to come to you,” he wrote. “With your eyes upon me, my tongue would refuse the task which my hand now falters over.” Then the whole story of his trip south was once more laid bare. The long letter ended with these words,—

“My heart is spent with agony, shame, and remorse. Winona, what can I say to you except that in a moment of awful temptation I closed my lips. Life has been one tangle of torturing secrets ever since. The more I became involved in their meshes, the more it seemed impossible to break away, to save myself and you. The only moments in which I have not utterly loathed myself have been those when I saw myself through your eyes,—and even those have been poignant shame and sorrow. After I left you last night, I met Dr. Adam Links. He was waiting to see you. Belle

must have told him of our betrothal. I thought the sight of him would drive me mad. I sprang upon him, cursed him, I know not what. He taunted me with cowardice and with wronging you. Belle will tell you the rest. I made her tell me the solemn truth about your parentage—asking if she knew the truth. She told me that you were the daughter of Leon and Timosa de Monteano. Aye, I made her swear that she told the truth, and she took a solemn oath. And yet, and yet,—I do not believe it, I cannot believe it till proofs mount—ain-high place it beyond the shadow of a doubt. But that makes me none the less guilty of cowardly deception. I cannot ask you to forgive me. You can never understand the little steps which bore me down to a pit so black. To think that the sweetest joy my life can ever know has been so mingled with a conscious degradation I would have scorned to believe possible! To think that I have so wronged you, noblest and purest of human souls! From the moment I closed my lips when I should have spoken, from that moment, invisible hands seemed to drive me into pitfalls of secrecy and shame. One after another, I was forced to cover up my inmost thoughts. I believed it would all come out right in the end. Though I could never find proof to the contrary, I could not, for more than an awful moment at a time, credit this awful thing which confronts us. I have wronged Adam Links. My conscience tells me so, and I will write it for conscience' sake—but in my heart I hate him—hate him for his love for you. He loves you, Winona! and what have I to say? My position is more cruel than the grave. I cannot think. I cannot plan. I cannot pray. No more hideous and unnatural barrier could be dreamed of in hell. I cannot advise you. My heart, my mind, my soul are at sea. O my pride in my own virtue! in

my clean record, in Grandfather Bearall's trust! Where are they?

"Never again can I do aught but pity the vilest wretch who sins. May God forgive me for all the wrongs that I have done!

"WILTON."

A few days later Wilton received his answer.

"DEAR WILTON,

"The truth forces itself upon me as it has upon you. I am trying to accept. It is such a cruel situation. There seems an awful wickedness in it. I cannot tell just how to write. I hope you will forgive me. It is perfectly right that I should see you,—that we should adjust ourselves to this new tie, which our past relation—violates, but I think you will not come now. Perhaps you feel as I do that some inevitable, irretrievable separation would be the kindest for us both. We are both alone. But I realize that what in other circumstances would be so natural, would be for us forever impossible. We can never care for one another as our true relation suggests. What I have written—forget. What I have not written—also forget. I cannot find words wherewith to hide my thoughts.

"WINONA."

After this Winona gave up her school and tried to busy herself at home. She looked sadly worn and changed. Belle watched her as day after day, she took her place opposite her at the little table; but their eyes seldom met.

Aunt Milly, filled with a nervous dismay, and for once bereft of all tactful thoughts or words, called and asked for Winona.

But with a tender little message of love, and a plea for forgiveness, she begged for her seclusion. Good Aunt Milly went away wiping her eyes and saying, "Did ever any one think of such an awful situation!"

Left much to herself, Belle had her own thoughts. She had yielded to a desperate impulse—a desperate temptation. The die was cast. Now she had to manage the situation in which she had involved herself. She had sworn to a certain statement. Was that statement true or false? She had no reason in the world to believe that it was true. She had often heard her father and mother speak to each other of Winona as a child of unknown parentage. Certainly they had not tried to deceive each other. More than that, her mother had told her positively that Winona was not the child of the De Monteanos. She could not deceive herself into a belief that her mother was capable of a downright lie. This, then was her only course. Her mother must, by means fair or foul, be forced into upholding her in her statement. If she had been coerced into sharing and covering her father's secret, she must and could be compelled to share and cover this one also.

Three weeks crept by and Belle received a letter from California. She opened it with a sense of dread. Her mother had been making preparations to return home. Belle supposed that this letter would give the date of her expected arrival. She read—

"MY DEAR BELLE,

"I deemed it both useless and unwise to send a telegram. It is my most unhappy duty to convey to you sad news. Your mother died very suddenly last evening. The two sisters are again united. If the sympathy of one who has

himself suffered so recently and so deeply is of any comfort in your hour of affliction, accept, my dear niece, the heart-felt sympathy of

“YOUR UNCLE.”

Belle sat stunned, with the letter in her hand. She could not believe it. She had not thought of this. She was an orphan now indeed. It was her punishment—her awful punishment for the false oath. Belle was stricken to the heart. If she had been like most girls, she would have poured out at Winona's feet an hysterical confession and plea for forgiveness. But she was not like most girls. Her capacity for suffering was not so deep, her conscience not so tender, but her powers of self-repression and self-control were beyond her age and sex.

She went to Winona's room, and in silence presented the letter.

Winona read. The tears sprang to her eyes and she reached up and put her arms around Belle's waist, but the girl drew away from the caress, trembling.

Belle's bereavement aroused Winona out of the first selfishness of her grief. Silently and with pitying sympathy she took charge of all necessary arrangements. Mrs. Stillwater's body was sent home and interred by the side of her husband. Once, only, Belle broke down and sobbed in an abandonment of grief. It was when she received Wilton Bearall's few lines of sympathy and consolation.

It now became necessary to make some different arrangements about the home. Belle's relatives advised her to give up the house. Both her mother's brother and her father's sister offered her a home with them. But to all such propositions she turned a deaf ear. She finally rented the

greater part of the house, reserving a small suite of rooms for herself and Winona, whom she begged to remain with her.

Thus for a time, the girls lived on together. It was an unnatural life for both. Their intercourse was without friction, but oppressively formal. Each was wrapped in her own somber thoughts. Belle suffered the crimonations of her conscience in silence. Matters were not turning out as she anticipated. She believed that after the first shock, only one thing could follow, Wilton and Winona would accept and live out the relation of brother and sister. She had not looked for this complete cutting off of all intercourse and communication. What had her terrible false oath done for her, now that it had destroyed every chance of seeing him—of winning him. She had loved him before,—she worshiped him now. Had not his beautiful head lain upon her breast! Had not his warm blood stained her bosom! In all her repressed, colorless life she had not dreamed of such an awful ecstasy as that which thrilled her very being at his touch. Even the grief of her mother's death was swallowed up in this intense, burning, resistless longing to see him again, to feel him beside her. Had she not perjured her very soul for love of him? How could she be expected to bear it all in silence without a sign, without one single word. It began to be an awful torture to her to sit opposite Winona and feel that hers were the eyes he loved, hers were the lips he had kissed. It seemed to her, sometimes, that she would scream it out—this dreadful secret torturing her breast with its ghastly futility. What was Winona's love compared to hers! she asked herself bitterly. What was the love of such an ardent nature, with so many friends, such divided affection! *She* had no love but this one, and for her there had never

been one kiss in return. Sometimes her mood was so agonizing in its hopelessness, that she quivered to break the spell by a fierce confession, a confession that would bring Wilton once more springing happily up the stone steps, that she might hear his springing footsteps in the hall, that she might listen trembling for his ringing manly voice. But he might never come now, and yet—there she sat, day after day opposite a hated face, hoping that that face might bring him back—for her.

That part of Adam's letter which related to himself engaged very little of Winona's attention at the time it was received. But as the lonely days crept by, the neglected words came back to her. She first began to think of him, and then to long for him as she did in the old childish days. Her heart was cut off from every other living tie. It seemed to her that she must lean on something, must rest somewhere. How could she go on all the long dreary days with no one older to advise, to comfort, to make her forget.

She brought out the package of letters and read. How full of love and noble tenderness they were! Her eyes filled with tears as she conned them. How little she had really appreciated them when her own heart was full of love and hope. Now she too was lonely, hopeless, and crushed. What comforting fondness there was in the endearing epithets. Poor Wilton, his jealous heart had deceived him! These were not the letters of a lover, but the outpourings of a heart which could love unselfishly beyond the bounds of ordinary friendship. Why should she not write to him?—She would.

At the resolve, the first animation she had shown in days came into her face. She took pen and paper.

"MY DEAR AND TRUSTED FRIEND."

"Have you forgiven me for my cruel little note on that awful morning? I find that you must have known all. Perhaps you understood. I have just re-read the package of letters which came to me from the hands of your lawyer. Something impels me to write to you. It would be impossible for me to tell you here all the varying circumstances which have kept me from writing to you before. But I am not afraid to tell you all now, if you will some day let me. I have no pride left to keep me back. I know all the strange circumstances and events which have surrounded your life, and Wilton's, and mine. I am broken-hearted, helpless, and alone. I don't know that any other girl in all the world would appeal to a man she had not seen for years as I am appealing to you. But I have no one whose advice I may ask, and if I had, who is there that could know or understand *you*? You could not take advantage of my confidence, Adam. I could trust you with all that I have—and do, for there is nothing but myself. Write to me, or come to me; and tell me how I am going to live my life. Advise me, for here I sit, helpless, day after day, and know not where to take up again the broken threads. I am so weary, so heart-sick that I can only think of you as the great, strong fatherly man, comforting the sobbing child over her lost curls. O Adam, can you comfort me over my lost love, my lost hope, my lost dreams? Can you make me believe, as in the long ago, that it was all for my good? It seems impossible now, but I will listen to you as I listened to you then. Perhaps you can make me understand. How selfish I am! You have suffered so long and so many things, and yet I find only words in which to pour out my own crushed heart. But I will not ask forgiveness. My selfish-

ness is so deep that I can see it and not be ashamed. Write to me.

“WINONA.”

Old Pompey brought in Adam's evening letters and then went out to superintend the simple meal it was his duty to serve.

When the preparations were complete, and he went cheerfully in to call his master to the table, he found him with his head bowed upon his arms.

The old negro's face fell and he tiptoed out again shaking his white head and muttering disconsolately to himself. “Bad news, I guess. Bad news. Seems to me de poor doctor gets his full.”

When Pompey's pert young assistant complained of his master's long delay and the spoiled food, the old negro cuffed him soundly on the ear and said peevishly, “Shut up, sah! What do a young fool like you know about de doctor's business!”

But when the master finally appeared, he was smiling with a strange uplifted expression of happiness in his eyes. He had no pleasant word for the old servant, no cheerful praise for the tasty food, but the tender look grew brighter and brighter upon his face.

Pompey bowed him out with his old habit of deference but as he closed the door after him, he muttered wonderingly to himself, “That man do beat all, he do beat all I ever see.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR once Dr. Links' patients took second place. As he made preparations to go north, his thoughts became more and more painfully introspective. He began to weigh himself by the scale of his past, and, in the uncompromising rigor of his judgment, found himself wanting. Then the hopes he had cherished, lost, and cherished again, under the influence of that brief letter, seemed slipping again from his too-rude grasp. He no longer looked on life with sun-blinded eyes. He said to himself, with a touch of the old bitterness, that his new outlook for the future had been a delusion, the last lingering traces of his madness. And yet—and yet—! Somehow there was always that "and yet," but he refused to define it to himself. It was enough for him to know that Winona had appealed to him almost in the old childish way. It was not for him to hope, to fear, even to decide. She had sent for him and what was there now but to go.

He reasoned to himself against the painfulness of the thought that Winona was so ignorant of his love, of his daring hope. He assured himself relentlessly that it was only this ignorance, yes, this indifference to him, that made her too-trustful letter possible. He schooled himself severely on the only possible manly conduct left for him, and yet—! He wondered how he should meet her and play his self-forgetful part in the dream of her appeal. He argued to himself that a mere sense of humor ought to save a man from

this tenacious clinging to an ideal, ought to save him from a hopeless love that had grown upon nothing more tangible than a memory. But this reflection so stirred his soul with bitterness and self-distrust that he finally dismissed it as unworthy of him. What real thing had there been in his life after all but this ideal!—and should he despise himself for clinging to it?

The long journey in the silent company of his busy thoughts did not serve to make his purposes or hopes more clearly defined. When at last he passed under the lamp post which stood as the dumb reminder of a savage anger and a hopeless passion, he only regarded it with a curious dullness of spent emotion. He rang the door-bell and waited, vacantly wondering how he should meet a response to his summons.

It was Winona herself who opened to him. They stood for a second looking at each other, then Winona, in a sweet nervous voice that would tremble a little, began to introduce herself to him, as though the set little speech had been shaping itself in her mind, during the anxious waiting.

Adam tried to say something in reply, but a hot throb of confusion swept away the words, as he thought how little he needed an introduction after that long look at the slim white figure in the window. The old bashful awkwardness of his boyhood seemed to hold him in its spell. Her innocence made his consciousness painful, embarrassing, and almost without knowing it he dropped her trembling fingers from his brief, formal clasp. She gave him a quick startled glance, then turned her flushed face hastily away, murmuring some half-intelligible remark about his trip.

The questioning glance recalled Adam to himself. It was quite in his usual voice that he assured her of the sincere

relief and gladness which her letter had brought him, of his anxiety to serve her as, in spite of the long years of misunderstanding and neglect, she must too well know. But Winona felt the reserve of his manner, was sensitive to the atmosphere of repression which he would not or could not shake off.

After all, they could not take up the thread of life just where it had been broken off so long ago. Adam seemed so changed. Or was it she who had changed! Why did he relapse into that painful silence after the low-spoken words, and why had he looked at her with that strange intentness of gaze. She began to question the wisdom, even the modesty, of her letter to him, and the flush deepened upon her cheek.

The serving of tea to the traveler was a welcome relief to them both, for the little domestic bustle and preparation made serious conversation unnecessary.

Presently she called him to the table and seated herself opposite him. She had purposely planned it so, thinking to recall thus early one of the sweetest memories of their friendship, but even this little plan now seemed forward and unmaidenly, like the letter.

The incidents of his trip had thus far conspicuously engrossed their conversation. Winona vaguely wondered what other safe and comfortable topic could be presented next, and while she still hesitated, conversation waned and embarrassment increased. Her eyes had avoided him, busying themselves with the details of the little table, but when the conversation came to a long stop, she was impelled to look up at him. She felt again his deep eyes upon her, but this time looked bravely back. As their glances met, the spell of consciousness and embarrassment was broken,

the look deepened into one of mutual confidence and awakened sympathy.

Adam spoke first, and there was ill-suppressed emotion in his voice as he said gently, "Winona, do you remember when we took tea together on that last night?"

The old cadence of his voice came back now, and the quick tears sprang to her eyes as she said impulsively, "Why, Adam, I remember it as though it were yesterday!"

"And do you recall how I choked," he went on eagerly, "and how you jumped down from the table and pounded me on the back to relieve me?"

A twinkling smile shot through her wet lashes, and Adam's throat threatened a repetition of the spasm to which he referred, then a sweet seriousness took the place of the smile on Winona's face and she suddenly reached across the little table, meeting Adam's outstretched hand half-way, as though the same impulse of renewed friendship had actuated them both.

"You seem just the same to me now," she said simply. And thus the old relations were renewed.

The week of his visit slipped by all too quickly. Adam had held himself rigidly to Winona's resumption of the old friendly association. When he was alone, he wondered over and over how he managed to do it, when so often the tones of her voice made him tremble, when every touch of her hand thrilled him with unspeakable joy and pain. It maddened him to see her so unconscious, and yet he was in very terror lest some unguarded word or look of his should dispel her childish confidence and rob him of the painful sweetness of her unreserve.

But he had been master of himself, and every night in the quietness of his darkened room, he felt a dumb thankfulness

that the day had passed so well, and a feverish anxiety for the dawn of the next—even one more at whatever cost.

Belle and Dr. Links had met with formal politeness. Their previous meeting in the library and its abrupt ending had been ignored by both.

Winona had never known why Wilton returned to the house after meeting Dr. Links outside. She took it for granted that it was with the express purpose of extorting from Belle that final and fatal confession of the truth.

Belle, who held the memory of that evening as the awfullest and dearest thing in her life, did not care to enlighten her; while Adam, who was ignorant of what had happened to Wilton as the result of that last blind, mad thrust, had nothing to tell.

So Belle did not inflict her presence upon the two more than she felt necessary. She did not care to be questioned by Dr. Links as to the exact facts which had prompted that solemn oath made to Wilton. However, had she been questioned, she had this explanation ready.—Her mother had confessed to her that the story of Winona's illegitimate birth had been one of the subterfuges to cover the unlawful use of Winona's money. Belle shrank from using her dead mother's name to thus substantiate a lie, so she studied to avoid the necessity of such an outcome.

But the time had passed with safety to all concerned, and Belle congratulated herself that the last evening of this dangerous visitor's presence had arrived.

Adam and Winona sat alone in the little parlor, with only the light from the big hall globe shining in one long stream of radiance across the room. He had borne to hear, little by little, through all the week, scraps of her story. He had somehow stonily endured to hear her speak of Wilton in

that voice and with that look which only Wilton's name could call forth, but, to-night, as the hours crept on, it seemed to him that his heart would beat itself free from his breast. The crisis must come. He could no more hold it back than he could stem the flood-tide of a swollen river. But how to meet it like a man; how to hold that adorable confidence and trust which filled him at times with an exalted tenderness that might have inspired her guardian angel.

She was sad at the thought of his departure, and she showed it without reserve—as also without reserve she sat down beside him on the sofa and, looking a deep regret into his eyes, said falteringly,—

“You are going so soon, Adam, and I can never make you understand the depth of my gratitude that you came to help me, to show me how noble a life may be that has lived down misfortune and disaster and forgotten itself for others.”

“Oh, Winona!” he cried, “don’t think I have forgotten myself. Sometimes I think it is beyond all human power to forget self. Life has been one bitter lesson that I must forget, and yet,—Self has never pleaded so loudly as to-night.”

As he spoke, he rose suddenly to his feet, and, taking a few steps away from her, grasped the corner of a projecting mantel, as though he would steady his emotions by this physical support.

She looked up at him, her face for the first time filled with a sudden shyness, fear, and apprehension.

His set face relaxed at sight of it, and one of his rare smiles broke over his face as he said playfully, “There, Winona! I suspect I made you think of the days when you used to cover me with sand on the seashore and I was

the big dog that jumped out with a bark and a snap to scare you."

Winona laughed a little nervously and looked relieved. Then Adam sat down again by her side.

"Where is Belle?" he asked.

"I think she must be in her room," replied Winona. "Shall I call her?"

"No indeed! her presence never gave me any pleasure even when a little child," said Adam. "I was thinking of your living alone with her here, so far from where I can look after your interests. Do you trust her friendship now?"

"Oh, yes; she has been greatly changed since her father's death. Perhaps she has surmised that I relieved the dying man of all responsibility in regard to the property, and that has made her have a kindly if not grateful feeling toward me."

"Perhaps so," replied Adam doubtfully. "Winona, has your experience with guardians been so bitter that you fear to accept another?"

"No, indeed!" she replied cordially, holding out her hand to him. "I appropriated you to myself in that capacity even before you suggested it."

Adam retained her hand in a trembling clasp. He seemed choking for utterance, but again that frank unconsciousness walled him within himself and seemed to shame the very impulses of his love. But his heart would not be stilled by the voice of prudence, and he said huskily, "Winona, who will be the guardian of your life?"

"God will!" she whispered, her eyes swimming in sudden tears, "since he took from me the other."

Adam's heart faltered. "The other!"—yes, there was

still that other. He thought of himself, she thought only of "the other." Great God! could he not be a man and measure up to that ideal of unselfishness with which she innocently regarded him! A great wave of protective tenderness swept over him. He would be greater than himself. What right had he to her love, he so old and worn with life, she so young, so fit for the companionship of youth! But there was something which was his—her confidence her trust, God help him to keep that!

The moment of exaltation was strangely powerful. It lifted him to the plane of the spiritual and ideal.

"Winona," he said softly, with the light of a new-born consciousness in his eyes, "could you understand that I would thank God to be the guardian of your life even without asking to be the guardian of your heart?"

The startled look crept back to her face, but he would not let her withdraw her hand.

"Do not fear me, Winona, I shall not urge you against your lightest wish. God forbid that my words should disturb your confidence and trust. I only ask you to think of your life, your future, and having thought, if it seems best, forget the very sound of my words."

For a long time she sat there, gazing into the stream of yellow light, till her eyes were blinded to external things and her thoughts were buried in the memories that came back to her with the old undying force.

"I cannot forget," she faltered at last, coming to herself with a sudden start. "I cannot be unfaithful to him!"

"But, Winona," he urged gently, "cannot you understand that in the strangeness of your position, faithfulness to him is denied you?"

"But in my heart I never believe it true!" she cried bit-

terly. "What if some fearful day it should be proven that our hearts were right! Suppose then that we were separated forever!"

"In that day, Winona, should you still be his in heart, you should be free. It would be my moral right to free you from the only bond I have asked you to assume, the formal protection of my name. Perhaps you cannot understand it, Winona, but to a heart denied through life as mine has been, the very husks of joy become as the kernel to other men."

She looked at him long and searchingly. She seemed to challenge the truth and honor of his very soul, but his eyes met hers unflinchingly.

Suddenly with a sigh that was half a sob, she put both hands in his.

With a strange thrumming in his ears, but with a masterful sense of godlike power over self and all untoward things of life, he bent over and kissed her on the forehead.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT the Bearall Farm it was again early fall. The skirting woods bore a radiant tinge of their coming glory. On the old sentinel chestnut trees, the plump green burrs hung thickly. The same frost which had laid its resistless hand upon the maple trees had touched the lips of the chestnut burrs, and, from the sudden parting, the half-ripe nuts peeped palely forth.

The corn still green, stood in shocks upon the stubbly field, and the apples in the great orchard turned their pale cheeks to the oblique autumn sun for a riper, richer kiss.

Farmer Bearall had just been leading the colts to pasture. The great red sun was dropping down behind the hazy hill and the western sky was bathed in one glory of crimson and gold.

As the colts broke from the loosened halters and bounded, mad with the joy of freedom, up the steep hill, they seemed to dash into the blaze of sunset glory and disappear.

Farmer Bearall drew his trembling hand over his failing eyes and said musingly, "I'm gettin' so old and feeble now, seems to me I shan't be sorry when it comes time for me to disappear in the comin' glory. I don't know what 'ud become of poor mother though, if I should go first. She's gettin' so feeble in her mind that it won't be no easy job to take care of her after a little. The worst of it is she don't know it. The more forgetful her mind grows, the perter she

believes it is, and there ain't nobody on earth that can make her believe she's made a mistake when she once says a thing."

Aroused from his soliloquy by the sudden plunge of a great bullfrog jumping from the bank into the pond at his right, Father Bearall bent painfully and put up the bars one by one. Then he took his way slowly and feebly to the house.

The old man's working days were almost over. A suitable tenant had been found who now managed the farm, but the aged couple kept the little rooms they loved best, and Father Bearall still helped to take care of the live stock—the dumb companions that had so long listened in silence to his soliloquies.

As he neared the house, he saw a boy on horseback approaching from the opposite direction.

They met just in front of the dooryard gate, and the messenger, leaning down, handed Father Bearall a telegram.

The old man's hands began to tremble as he hunted nervously for his glasses, but the messenger said kindly, with the familiarity of neighborly privilege, "Don't be frightened, Mr. Bearall, it's only to say that Wilton's coming home to spend a few days."

"You don't say so," faltered the farmer delightedly. "Thank you kindly, boy. What did the chap send a telegram for! I'm afraid that new inheritance of his is makin' him kind a extravagant. But it wouldn't be no more'n what could be expected that the boy should have his little fling after savin' all these years.

"I suppose now you've heard about Wilton's pedigree hain't you?" he asked, almost forgetting the telegram in his anxiety to vindicate Wilton's long obscure history to all the world.

"I heard that he'd found his grandfather and been left a fortune," returned the young man.

"Well, that's about all I've heard," said Mr. Bearall, "but whatever it is, it must be good, and I've allus told Wilton, from a little shaver, it would be. It's more'n likely that he's comin' up to-night to tell us all about it."

"Well, I must be off," said the messenger. "I hope it'll be as good as you think, and that Wilton won't forget the man that's done so much for him, in the midst of his good fortune."

"Well, I just guess it ain't like Wilton to forget any one that's done him a good turn," returned Farmer Bearall, indignant at the mere insinuation. "Our own son couldn't do no better by us than he has and I'd risk his ped——"

But the messenger was out of hearing and Farmer Bearall broke short his oft-repeated assurance and hastened in to tell the good news to his old wife.

"Well, mother, we're goin' to have company. Who do you think it is?"

"Massy on us, father!" cried his wife, springing abruptly from her chair, wiry still. "I don't believe that lazy gal has a livin' thing in this house fit for company to eat."

"What's good enough for us is good enough for company," declared Farmer Bearall stolidly, "specially when he's been used to it for years."

"That's just like you, Isaac Bearall," broke out his indignant wife. "In the first place you get a poor huzzy of a girl that don't know nothin' about keepin' victuals up, and then you have the face to insult me by sayin' 'Anything's good enough for company.' When I was let alone to do my own work I allus had things up ship-shape. As father allus said, 'Nothin' ever went to sleep around Catherine,'

an' no more there don't. But there ain't no use tryin' to teach men. As many years——"

"But," interrupted her husband desperately, "you ain't even asked who's comin' yet."

"Ain't asked!" ejaculated his spouse contemptuously. "Here I bin standin' waitin' and you ain't seen fit to open your head about who 'tis. But it allus did take you an hour to get anything out, and I s'pose it allus will."

"I s'pose so, mother," replied the old man resignedly. "'Pears like there ain't no sign of a change yet and ain't likely to be, 'nless the blast of the trumpet brings it."

"There you go on talkin' and quotin' Scripture and me a standin' here waitin' as if I wan't stiffer'n an old cart-horse with rheumatism, an' as if there wan't company comin' to supper and not the first thing fit to eat in the house."

Mr. Bearall broke open the telegram at last and read. "Don't be frightened. Will be up to-night for a few days."

And so he came. By the time the young farmer's girl, with the unnecessary and uncomfortable help of Mrs. Bearall, had made ready the homely tea, Wilton drove up to the gate.

Father Bearall's unfailing keen ears heard the sharp sound of the horse's hoofs when they were still far up the hill.

He stood at the horse-block to receive the well-loved grandson of his adoption, and Wilton's eyes blurred as he caught sight of the bent form, and the snow-white locks silvering in the moonlight.

"You ain't goin' to forget this old granpop now you got a new one, be you?" he asked in a quavering voice, as the young man sprang out of the buggy and grasped the trembling hand.

"No use to ask that, sir," replied Wilton huskily. "I

never had but one grandfather and never will have, for the other one is dead, you know!"

"So he is, so he is" replied the old man. "I clean forgot he must be dead now that you've got the money. But you're welcome home, my boy, welcome home, and you'd be just as welcome if you hadn't no pedigree and no bequest."

"I well believe that, grandfather," replied Wilton, throwing his strong young arm across the old man's shoulder, "and thankful I am to have such a home to come to."

"You must be prepared for a great change in grandmother," explained the farmer. "Like enough she's forgot you're comin' by this time. She can't keep a thing in her head more'n ten minutes at a time, but she's most as spry as ever."

And so Wilton found it. When he entered, grandma sat industriously knitting in her chair, as tranquil as if nothing unusual had happened.

"Well, mother! Here's Wilton at last," announced her husband.

"Wilton! Why!" she cried, as the young man bestowed a kiss upon her wrinkled cheek, "why for massy's sakes didn't you tell me he was comin', so we could a-had some-thin' fit to eat in the house? As father——"

"Why don't you ask how Milly is, mother," broke in her husband hurriedly. "You must be just dyin' to know. I'm sure I am."

"Of course," replied Mrs. Bearall, annihilating her husband with a glance. "How is your Aunt Milly, son? Laws a-massy! my mind goes back some twenty years ago when Milly wrote to tell us about you and urgin' us to take you. Father was that mad at the idea that he said something that wan't by no means Scriptural, but I jest made up my

mind to have you, and I started that very next morning down to the city, all stark alone, and brought you back with me. I can't say I've ever bin sorry either ! ”

Father Bearall gave Wilton a helpless appealing look which was immediately answered by a half smile and nod of comprehension. Then the old lady returned to finishing the row across Teddie's tenth pair of winter socks.

Farmer Bearall waited impatiently for the supper to be over and for the other members of the family to repair to their early rest. He was consumed with curiosity to hear Wilton's story.

At last the two, old man and young, drew their chairs up on opposite sides of the little table.

“ Now, Wilton ! if you'll forgive your old grandfather, who never had nothin' but your best interests to heart, perhaps you'll tell me what's makin' you look so downhearted, and so sick. Don't answer yet ” (seeing he was about to speak.) “ I want you to know I ain't the one to be hard or unforgivin' to a young man when he's down. I'm one that believes in leanin' down and helpin' the lamb out when it falls into a hole. I 'spected to see you come home pert and happy with the new pedigree and the new money, but 'stead of that you come home thin and downcast and sad. Now don't keep nothin' from your old grandfather, I beg of you ! If you've got into trouble, here's the ears to hear it.”

“ Oh, grandfather,” replied Wilton, chokingly. “ I haven't got into any trouble with the money, as you seem to suppose ; but the pedigree has brought nothing but misery with it. I can't tell you all about it to-night but you shall know every word before I leave. Perhaps the best way to begin is to tell you the strangest thing first. My grandfather was the man who used to own this house, Daniel A. Burbank ; and I was born

in that very little room upstairs where you and grandmother sleep."

"For the Lord's sake!" said Farmer Bearall slowly and reverently. Surely His ways are past findin' out—and to think that you were brought back here to be raised—and out of that New York asylum too. I can't hardly believe my ears!"

"I don't wonder you can't, grandfather. I could not believe mine." Then he told the story, or so much of it as related to himself. He did not, he could not yet, speak of that other child that had been born to Timosa Burbank.

The old man listened with breathless attention. "It's just like a fairy, story, Wilton" he said, drawing a relieved sigh. "The older I get, the more I believe the Lord usually finds a way to show up the devil's tricks in the end. To think that He's used two poor old country people like mother and me to make things all come out straight—and little Milly in it, too! Well, well, I'm clean beat out with wonderin'. I 'spect now there ain't nothin' to hinder your gettin' married as soon as you want to. How is the little yellow-haired gal, Wilton? I allus said she was as likely a little miss as ever lived, and a blessed contrast to that poor skimpy little creeter that come with her. Is she as pert and rosy as ever, Wilton?"

"Don't, grandfather!" said Wilton, with suddenly drawn face and haggard eyes. "That's a part of the story I can't tell you to-night. The marriage will never be now. It seems to me that everything about the old place makes me think of that day in the fall, she went away. It would have been better if she had never come, grandfather, better for us both."

"Why, boy, what has happened?" asked the old man

anxiously, as Wilton bowed his white face on his hands with a stifled groan. "The poor little thing ain't gone astray in that wicked city!" and his voice sank to a frightened whisper.

"O no, no!" groaned Wilton. "She is as pure as the driven snow. It's nothing that is any fault of hers. It's fate—and secrets—and cowardice. I can't talk about it, sir, not to-night," he faltered, pushing his chair away and pacing back and forth in front of the old fireplace, as Adam had done so long ago.

"It breaks my old heart to see you come back so full of trouble, boy," quavered the old man, the weak tears of age springing to his kindly eyes. "I thought I should live to see you settled down and happy, seein' that the Lord had mercifully preserved you with a pure life and a clean conscience."

Wilton winced, "Don't think me better than I am, grandfather. I haven't soiled my life with evil deeds, but my conscience has been a heavy load of care and secret anxiety since I saw you. It's swept clean at last, but the revelations have left my heart bare and empty of everything that seemed worth living for."

Father Bearall made no reply and, after a painful pause, Wilton asked drearily,

"Grandfather, is the old garret room just as it was when I left?"

"It's never been touched, son. Mother often worried me to break in the door and have the things overhauled. She said everything would be droppin' to pieces by this time, an' I guess she's right. But I promised Burbank to let the things alone, an', as he's never given no different orders, I've just followed out his first directions and not bothered 'em."

"Well, the heirlooms are mine now, though I can't say

they've brought me anything but trouble. I want to see the old garret, as nearly as possible, under the same conditions poor Adam Links did. It was in the night when he saw it. Let us go up now and investigate it by moonlight."

"How can we get the door off 'thout wakin' mother?" asked the old man hesitating.

"We can pry it off with an axe, without much noise, I think," replied Wilton. "At least we can try."

So an axe was procured from the woodshed and the two men proceeded on their strange quest. Farmer Bearall, feeling very much like a thief in his own house, and Wilton oppressed with the gloomy pictures his vivid imagination conjured again from the mysterious past.

Farmer Bearall went first, carrying the candle with shaking hand.

As Wilton passed the door of the little bedroom where he was born, a longing for the sight of the sweet young mother who alone could have swept away every doubt, poured over his soul with the anguish of despair.

Reaching the door, he fitted the edge of the axe into the frail hinges. With one strong wrench, the lower hinge gave way. Feverishly, he tried the second. Father Bearall raised the candle high in his hand.

As the flickering light fell upon Wilton's upturned face, bringing out the unusual gauntness of his features and the hollowness of the large, brilliantly-glowing eyes, the good farmer drew a quick breath of sympathy and silent sorrow.

For a moment the door withstood the determined young strength, then sank with a lurch toward the blackness within. Wilton caught it just in time to prevent its noisy fall. Then standing it up against the partition he muttered excitedly, "Take the candle away, grandfather."

The old man obeyed, wondering. Wilton stood peering into the darkness. His heart beating to suffocation. How well Adam had pictured it! How vividly had the memory remained with him all these years! As his eyes grew accustomed to the light, the masses of shadows, the great irregular heaps of boxes and bundles, the white canopied bed loomed before him.

For a moment he stood fascinated. Was this, then, the place where he had been tossed helpless into the lap of fate! How strangely had she dealt with him and his! Keenly, now, he pictured Adam's cruel moment of fear and indecision! Father Bearall crept softly back and stood beside him. The light through the high narrow window was dim and unsteady as the clouds swept silently over the face of the pallid moon.

Wilton took a few steps forward, cautiously feeling his way. The boards creaked dismally under his tread. The canopied bed was almost within reach of his hand, when somewhere behind him a stifled, brazen gong rang with harsh suddenness.—Clang! clang! clang!

For one unreasoning moment, Wilton stood rooted to the spot. The hair of his head seemed to rise. The very hoarse alarum, which Wilton had only accepted as the delirium of Adam's excited brain, greeted him now—come back after twenty-five years.

The moment of startled horror passed. Then Wilton called for the light.

Mr. Bearall hastened after it, and together they explored every corner of the musty room. As Wilton's eye fell on the piece of old blanket, now almost dropping to pieces with moth and age, he could not help shuddering. The mental image of the starved uncanny black cat made him

shrink in sudden loathing from every unknown, suggestive object.

In the corner from which the unseen bell seemed to have struck its muffled alarm, there was a square closet with locked door. This also Wilton forced from the hinges.

The closet proved to be knee-deep with old rubbish. Picking his way carefully over this, Wilton found in the far corner, a tall object over which a white sheet had been thrown.

Forcing back a feeling of superstitious dread, the young man pulled away the drapery, and the pale mild face of an old family clock looked up at him.

"It takes a very innocent thing to frighten a guilty conscience," said Wilton, half to himself. "But what on earth made the poor old buried thing ring!" he asked of his waiting companion.

"Some sudden joggling of the floor, I suppose," said the old man reflectively.

Wilton went back to the bed in the distant end of the room, and as he stepped on the creaking boards the old clock pealed forth again, as if some tender chord in its decaying heart had been rudely shaken.

"It is all explained,—and all substantiated," said Wilton wearily.

In the excitement of his quest he had forgotten the other part of the story yet untold. It came back with sickening force.

He stood the door up in its old place. "Let's to bed, grandfather! I have tired you enough for one night," he said kindly—and they passed back together down the long narrow passage, leaving the old garret and its revealed mysteries to slumber once more in peace.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE next day Wilton spent alone, wandering aimlessly all over the old farm.

He paused longest under the gnarled pear-tree from which he had dropped the ripe luscious fruit for Winona's birthday; the tree under which they had given and received their last free childish kiss, and heard Belle's taunting words of unchildlike rebuke.

At the noon hour, and in the evening, he returned to the house and sat down at the family table. He was quiet and preoccupied, but grandmother filled up all intervals with her ready tongue and grandfather forebore to question him.

After supper he disappeared. Isaac Bearall wandered about, growing more troubled and apprehensive as he waited. By and by he could bear it no longer and set out to search for him.

Wilton had watched the sun sink behind the western hill. When its last red streaks faded from the sky, he turned slowly away and wandered into the great barn where the rich store of summer hay still retained something of the freshness and sweetness of the open fields. The subtle fragrance turned him sick at heart. How often they had frolicked here together, careless, glad children of Nature. Why had not Nature told her secret to them then! Why had she held her peace until a love sprang up in their hearts at which she herself need blush! Sweet motherly Nature,

everywhere about him so beautiful, so beneficent! Had she indeed deceived them? Or had the false, bitter world laid a mysterious snare for their innocent feet!

He left the barn where the shadows were gathering, and where the sparrows were already twittering their last happy notes before settling to rest under the eaves, and wandered across the fields to a cluster of maples beside the spring pond.

Here he threw himself face down upon the grass. The pond lapped gently against its banks, and a garrulous little stream trickled gleefully away from its mother waters. The crickets chirped and the katydids grated their persistent plaint upon his ear. The brook mint assailed his senses with its pungent, spicy odor, and, as if in pity for his loneliness, the cows behind the fence, chewed audibly their stored cuds, the colts cropped the short second growth of summer grass, and the bullfrogs plunged noisily into their muddy homes.

Wilton was half oblivious of it all. He had determined, here in this place where he had first seen her, to throw off the unnatural love which now shamed them both. Instead of this, the old fascination, the old binding attraction held him stronger, fiercer, than ever, as if in desperate battle against a bitter wrong.

Lost in the painful struggle of his heart and conscience, Wilton did not know that he was discovered, till a trembling old hand was laid upon his shoulder and he looked up, startled, to see Father Bearall's kind, sympathetic face bending over him.

He sprang up with a word of explanation and apology, but was checked by the same kindly hand, while his benefactor said falteringly:

"I didn't come here to be a trouble to you, son, but I

got kind o' anxious, seein' you didn't come home after it was dark, so I thought I'd start out to hunt you up. I don't want to appear pryin', but it weighs on my old heart for fear you might go back to the city to-morrow without tellin' your trouble to me. If your old grandpop can't do anything more for you, he can, at least, be sorry. And it ain't everybody in this world that can even be sorry when they see a brother man strugglin' with trouble."

"You're too good to me, grandfather, to allow me to think a moment of leaving you in ignorance. I only put off the evil thing as long as I could. I told you last night that the marriage between Winona and myself would never be. She is my—my sister. We are the children of the same mother."

The old man stared at him for a moment speechless with amazement. Then he blurted out, "I don't believe a word of it! You've told me strange things enough about your own life. It don't stand to reason nor common-sense that that little gal should turn out to be your sister into the bargain. Mighty queer things happen nowadays, but they generally stop short of a miracle, and I'd bet my bottom dollar that there's a screw lose somewhar."

All this he poured out in one explosive breath of defiance. The decided tone sent a thrill through Wilton's despairing heart, but it was only a quivering spasm of hope and passed away.

"It seems too terribly sure, grandfather," he replied, mournfully, as he further explained the details.

The old man's face grew solemn and dejected as he listened, and more than once the back of his trembling hand was drawn across the sympathetic old eyes.

"Looks pretty dark! Looks pretty dark," he murmured

sadly as Wilton relapsed into depressed silence, "but somehow I feel as though the good Lord couldn't let it be so."

"I don't know, grandfather. I'm afraid my faith is not so strong as that. It seems to me that His unchangeable laws interfere very often and very fatally with our human hopes and desires; but it's borne very forcibly upon me that we have to abide by them, notwithstanding. It would certainly, be much to our comfort to think otherwise, but what seems truth to each of us as individuals must stand either our hope or our despair in time of trial. An honest man cannot fling away a conviction because it has a sharp side.

"Yes, yes, son, there's nothin' that stands to reason and common-sense better than that way of lookin' at it, but then, it ain't one o' God's laws that brother and sister should fall in love with each other,—'specially when they can't stop bein' in love,—and it goes against my common-sense to believe it."

With this dogged conclusion Farmer Bearall was forced to content himself.

Poor Wilton dared not accept the comfort of his grandfather's convictions, so they both sat in silence.

Presently the young man said affectionately, "Come, grandfather, the air is getting too cold and damp for you. We must go in."

"Son," said Farmer Bearall rising feebly, and leaning heavily upon his companion's strong arm, "I shan't have you out of my mind an hour, after you go away to-morrow. If anything good does happen, you'll let your old grandfather know at once. And Wilton," he said, stopping suddenly and placing his hand solemnly on the young man's shoulder, "whatever does come up, good or bad, keep your heart and

your conscience clean. Perhaps the Lord don't change great plans to suit us. But all His laws and plans go straight parallel with a clean conscience and a pure, true life."

"I'll try, grandfather," said Wilton in a low fervent voice of suppressed emotion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONCE again the busy season in Saint Augustine was at its height.

Adam Links was more pressed with work than ever before, but the more unceasing his toil, the greater strength and zeal seemed to be given him. His patients regarded him with wonder and told him that he must be drinking somewhere of the stream of perennial activity.

Adam only responded to this pleasantry with that rare inscrutable smile which no one of his patients had ever fathomed, and they were forced to be content.

The stream at which Adam drank strength and refreshment was in his own heart. Winona was coming back to him. The thought was like an endless song in his ears. She was coming back. What mattered it that she was to be his only in name, that she would leave behind her a captive love, bringing to him only a wounded and desolate heart. He could love her in his own peculiar way. He could care for her. He could protect her. Was not that enough for him who had never known other love, whose life had been bare and cold, except for this same love which had at last drawn her back to him? And then he was human. And hope is the most human and deathless of all the attributes of man's mind. What might not the future bring forth? What might not time and tenderness and unselfish devotion win back to the forsaken heart? Might not the captive love break its

fetters and return again to its deserted home—and to him? Ô God! the mere hope was sweet enough to live on, now that he should know her precious life was safe in his tenderest care.

So the doctor worked on, till the town curiosity was suddenly aroused to the highest pitch by the discovery that artisans were going daily back and forth to the villa.

Then, indeed, some of the boldest could not refrain from questioning. But the doctor turned away with a quiet smile in his eye and a shake of the head, answering them never a word.

"It must be something wonderful," said a peevish little invalid who had presumed upon her long acquaintance to question him. "I have seen the day when the doctor would have growled back at me as savage as a bear at such a question, but he never said a harsh word. One couldn't disbelieve in soul regeneration after comparing Dr. Links now with what he used to be. He is, positively, getting to be a saint."

But Adam enjoyed his preparations all to himself. Winona was to have the beautiful suite of rooms which had been her mother's. Adam meant that they should be fresh and bright to the acme of daintiness. It gave him indescribable happiness that he was planning for her greatest convenience and luxury. She had enjoyed so few luxuries, when by right so many had been hers.

The decorating of the little boudoir and chamber was almost completed, but the greatest improvement was yet to be made. A small room which had been used as a wardrobe was to be converted into a dressing-room with all the latest conveniences.

At last the plumbers were at work. The lead pipes were

slowly making their way up between the thick partitions, when they suddenly refused to go further. No use, pushing and twisting had no effect. There was a solid obstruction somewhere.

One of the workmen was sent above to make examination, and came back with an excited face.

"There is one of the neatest little cabinets you ever saw fitted into the wall. You would never discover it without lookin' for it. It must have been put there during war times to keep valuables in. Nothin' very valuable in it now, I guess. A heap of old half-chewed-up letters. A mouse has got a hole through one corner of it."

The workmen all hastened up to examine the find.

"I wonder if the doctor knows it's here?" said one.

"Don't believe he does," replied another. "But what are we goin' to do with it. It's got to be taken out of the way before we can do anything more here, an' the doctor probably won't be home before night."

"Better ask the old dark about it," suggested the first.

And faithful Pompey, so old he could not much longer serve his beloved master, was called to decide the question.

He felt the responsibility of the moment, but finally decided to have the cabinet taken out intact. So he carefully closed the little door and watched the workman pry it from its snug position. When it was finally lifted out, he carried it downstairs and placed it upon his master's library table. Then the plumber's work went on.

Adam had passed through a day of long hours and hard toil, but he had no thought of complaint. He only anticipated more than usual the delightful repose of his big arm-chair, where, for so many weary evenings, he had leaned his

head back against the cushions, closed his eyes, and thought happily of Winona.

He threw the reins to the stable boy, hung up his raincoat in the hall, and entered the library. Pompey's assistant was careless, and the doctor grumbled a little as he saw that the room was still unlighted. But a cheerful wood fire burned upon the grate, and, as it had been one of Saint Augustine's cold, stormy day's, Adam drew a low chair to the fire and warmed his chilled fingers over the ruddy blaze.

Presently Pompey hobbled slowly in to see if all were well with his master. Discovering the unlighted condition of the room, he hobbled out again, muttering imprecations on the "shiftless little nigger."

Adam smiled indulgently to himself in the darkness. He was not disposed to harbor trouble over trifles, now that the great things of life ministered to his good cheer.

The old negro hurried back with the pouting delinquent, and a flood of light soon filled the room.

"Turn it down! Turn it down, boy!" cried the doctor, "you put my eyes out. It's either total darkness or a perfect glare of light, with you. But it's that way with everything," he muttered, dropping his voice, "either nothing at all, or too much. I've had my share of the one and now it seems as though the other was most too much for me. I'm actually getting light—too light. I've got to steady down a bit!"

"What is it, sah?" asked Pompey respectfully as the young offender shuffled out.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, Pompey," said the doctor, throwing himself into his study chair. "Why, what on earth is this queer looking thing on my table?"

"Why, sah, that's a closet what the workmen found in the

wall when they was puttin' in the pipes. They couldn't do nothin' more till yo' come home if they didn't take it out o' the way, so I had 'em dig it out. I hope that was all right, sah, I didn't know what else to do."

"That was all right, Pompey," said the doctor kindly, turning the cabinet curiously around. "Strange nobody ever saw it before."

"It was put in so nobody would see it 'thout lookin' for it," responded the old negro. "Do you want anything more of me now, sah?"

"No, Pompey," replied his master, "shut the door after you and don't let anybody disturb me if it can be helped. I'm clean worn out to-night."

Pompey carefully obeyed the directions and left his master inspecting with interest the curious discovery.

The door of the little cabinet closed tightly without key-hole or catch. Adam did not at first notice that one of the panels was intended for a door, but catching a sight of papers through the mousehole in one corner, he began, a little nervously, to pry the sides with his penknife. Finally one of them loosened and then opened, showing the half-ruined letters.

He took them up curiously, but with care, for many of them were mutilated and some of them were dropping to pieces.

After a moment of scrutiny, a book of reverent sadness crept into his face. What a strange discovery after all these years! They were the letters of Raymond Carlyle to Timosa Burbank, his affianced, and some to Timosa Burbank Carlyle, then his wife. Also her letters to him.

Poor, anxious loving hearts. Here they had poured out their tenderest hopes and fears. Here, perchance, they had

talked sorrowfully of all the obstacles put in their way by the unfeeling, unscrupulous father. Here they had confided to each other their secret thoughts of the child which would be born to them.

Adam felt that these confidences were not for his eyes. So he carefully gathered the letters up one by one trying to fit ragged edges, so that little of the precious documents should be lost.

Presently he came to one which seemed to be in a different handwriting.

These words caught his eye :

"I longed to call her something, Timosa, so I named her Winona. It is so softly musical, and I thought it might be all the music she would have in her poor little life. God teach you to love her, my more than friend. Had I a heart left to break, it would now break to part with her. A little while longer and I shall be at rest."

It seemed to Adam that the blood was congealing in his veins. The sweat of sudden agony broke out upon his brow, but an awful unseen will seemed to force him to read on.

"Perhaps some day, when she is of age, when her happy sheltered life in your sweet care is beyond the power of such a blight, you may speak to her, her mother's name, tell her of the unhappy, sinning and suffering friend of your girlhood.

"ANNA CLAXTON."

"God deliver me!" burst from Adam's lips, as the letter dropped from his hand. "God help me!"

Then he sat rigid and speechless in his chair while a fierce defiant agony tugged at his heart, and the large drops upon his brow gathered and rolled slowly down his temples.

"It is intolerable!" he groaned aloud at last. "It is too

much ! too much ! God help me ! Everything but this !—to tell her myself !—to blast my own hopes !—to damn my own love. No, no, never ! It is more than human !”

He sprang up in sudden frenzy and pushed his chair heavily from him. His eyes, weary and listless no longer, glowed with a fierce, terrible light.

The wood fire had crumbled to ashes upon the hearth. He drew his trembling fingers feverishly through the soft flaky grayness. Every time a buried coal pierced spitefully the quivering flesh with a sharp pang, he smiled a ghastly smile and dug it up. One after another he tossed them into a pile, four, five, six smouldering red coals. He leaned over them gloatingly as though they were the captured demons of his distresses, then softly blew upon them with his panting breath. They fanned into redder glow, he blew longer, more steadily, and the ghastly smile deepened upon his set face. Then he seized the old crumbling, yellow letter. He laid it softly upon the greedy coals.

He held his two hands over the smouldering paper as if he would press it down, down to its destruction should any friendly draught of air seek to snatch it into safety. Then he bent low till an angry color spread over his brow and the veins swelled out like knotted cords. Gently, deliberately he blew the breath from his eager lips, faster, stronger, fiercer !—till a flame burst triumphant under his hand, and licked viciously at the shrinking paper. Ah ! it was theirs now ! And Adam burst into a low, long, shuddering laugh. The last mark of the original human intent stared into his face—Anna Claxton—and was blotted out.

It was gone. The charred wisp of paper that was last to yield, suddenly raised itself like a thing in pain, and fell back—ashes.

Adam blew gently upon his burned fingers and as he looked at them his face had the expression of a tortured demon.

Suddenly he sat down upon the floor, folded his arms about his knees and dropped his head upon his breast.

For a long time he sat there motionless. The room grew cold, the rain beat against the window panes, and the wind rattled the heavy casements.

At last Pompey came to the door and knocked. Adam rose to his feet, strode to the door and sternly locked it. "Not to-night! Don't disturb me again, for anyone,—for anything! I'm out to-night Pompey,—sick!—dead! Do you hear Pompey?—dead!"

"Oh sah! What's the matter with you? Won't you let your old Pompey in? There be ghosts about the house to-night, massa. I did hear one laugh like it was the devil himself."

"To bed, you old galoot, to bed! and leave the ghosts to me! I have given 'em a warm reception, Pompey,—get to bed!"

He crossed the room and threw himself once more into his chair.

Leaning his head back he sat there in silence, till the clock struck one. No man would ever know his thoughts, but the all-seeing eye of Love and Justice watched that bitter struggle. The Infinite Unknowable Consciousness that permits the mystery of human life noted for the Eternities that blood-bought victory.

Slowly a softer light passed over the haggard, suffering features, and the cause of evil was forever lost in the heart of Adam Links.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AFTER Adam left her, Winona slowly surrendered herself to his strange unselfish plan for her future.

The strangeness of it, after the first half-forbidding thoughts, did not so much concern her.

She knew very little of the world. Of the subtler forces and attributes of human nature, she knew still less. She had no adequate conception of the task to which Adam had set himself. But she believed in him with the Divine intuition of a woman, which often proves safer than a man's wisest reasoning. She missed him. She longed for him, as perhaps she might have longed for her mother had she ever known a real mother's care.

So, as time went on, she made her simple preparations to "go and live with Adam," as she childishly phrased it to herself, and waited for the day with expectancy, but with no mysterious fears or flutterings of the heart. She only regarded it in the light of the inevitable, irrevocable separation which she had written Wilton would be the kindest for them both.

But time passed rapidly, and it only wanted one day to that which had been set for Adam's return to New York. The day following his arrival, the quiet marriage was to take place.

The life of the two girls together had been steadily growing more formal and constrained. Winona was occupied with her own thoughts. Belle was restless, nervous, irritable, and absent-minded. She directed no bitterness toward

Winona, yet Winona could not but feel its presence in her heart. She laid it to Belle's loss of health, for the girl was growing thin, pale and languid.

On this last day together, the two meeting at the table had each tried to appear more cheerful.

"Belle," said Winona, "I have not asked what plans you have made, not because I did not feel an interest, but because I thought that you would tell me if you wanted me to know."

"It matters very little to me where I live," replied Belle, sharply. "I've got little to live for."

"It distresses me to hear you speak like that!" replied Winona. "I never can understand why you take such a bitter view of life. It is hard to be an orphan, but you have relatives who would be glad at any time to share their homes with you."

"You always had a genius for not understanding some things which would have been very plain to most people," replied Belle. "Not that I have any reason to complain on that account," she added with daring significance.

Winona looked at her with a puzzled expression, but said nothing.

"Will you be likely to meet your brother often after your marriage?" asked Belle suddenly, looking up sharply into her face.

Winona turned white to the lips. "I wish you would not speak that way, Belle," she faltered, with a sudden sickening feeling of despair. "I never think of—of either in that way."

"Dear me, I beg your pardon!" said Belle, with a flash of her old scorn. "You must have a very strange way of thinking!"

Winona left the table as soon as possible. Her heart was

like lead in her breast. Belle's terribly practical, unsoftened words had filled her with a nameless dread and apprehension. For the first time, she regretted her promise to Adam—regretted it with her whole soul. How had she thought of it?—Perhaps Belle was right—perhaps she did have a “strange way of looking at things,” a “genius for misunderstanding things that other people would comprehend.” How had she thought of Wilton? She had not thought at all. She had put him out of her mind all that it had been in her power—hoping to forget.

Now she felt that she could call aloud with all the piercing fear, sorrow, and despair of her soul. “Wilton! Wilton! Come to me. I need you! Come and save me from this awful thing that I have done!”

But she might not call him. He was not hers. He had never been hers! Oh, it was all coming back over her again. The hopeless agony she thought she had beaten down. How could she meet Adam this way? and he was coming that very evening.

For a long time she moved distractedly about her room, trying to compose her mind, trying to steady her thoughts, but when the door-bell rang her heart bounded like a caged thing in her breast, and she longed with a passion of fear to fly to the ends of the earth, if need be, to get out of sight and sound of Adam's face and voice.

“Dr. Adam Links, miss,” announced the conscious-looking maid.

Too late! She *must* see him.

Composing herself with a desperate effort, she slowly descended the stairs.

Her faltering hand turned the knob, but he had heard her coming. He opened the door.

"How do you do, Adam?" she gasped, feeling that every thought was written upon her face.

"And how do you do, Winona?" he returned in a low voice, taking her cold hand and drawing her to the sofa where they sat together that night which had been so eventful to them both.

He did not kiss her or draw her to his breast, and her heart gave a great throb of relief.

"You do not look very happy to-night, Winona," he said, still quietly, searching her face with his keen, sad eyes before he released her hand.

"I have been well," she faltered, "but you—you, have been ill," noticing for the first time the thinness of his face and the extreme pallor of his features.

"I have passed through severe labor—and sorrow, since I saw you," he said, in the same dull tone. "But it is mine. I did not come to share it with you."

They sat for a moment without speaking. Winona could not force one reasonable thought to her quivering lips.

Finally Adam broke the silence.

"Winona, I have found, to-night, what I feared to find."

Winona shuddered. She could not restrain herself much longer. Had he read her thoughts and her face so quickly?

"The thought of the relation which is to be between us has robbed you of your trust, your confidence, and your peace and happiness in my presence."

"Oh, Adam!" she faltered. "I—I have tried."

"It was a mistake that I longed to take care of you, that I longed to have my little ewe lamb back, was it, Winona?" he asked gently and sadly. "I could have paid any price, Winona, any price—but it was not to be."

"O, Adam," she cried, breaking down at last and sobbing

conclusively. "I do trust you! I believe in you once more with all my soul! But I am so miserable. I cannot, I cannot forget!"

As she gave him one glance imploring for sympathy and comprehension, he put his arm around her and drew her head to his shoulder.

She did not resist him.

"It is not the first time you have shed your tears on my breast, Winona," he continued. "Perhaps it was this which was to be my one and only privilege. I ought not to complain, my child. No man could have brought you greater solace for your saddest tears."

She did not answer him, and again he went on.

"Winona, I have passed through a terrible temptation. I cannot know how other men love, but I have loved you with a love as far beyond myself, beyond my poor, twisted, double nature, as heaven is beyond earth,—as life is beyond death. But it was not for me. It was only for me to come and wipe away your tears. Grief was not made for you, little one. Dry your eyes now, and call Belle, for I have something to say to her."

He put her gently away from him, and tenderly hushed her words, as she tried incoherently to explain, to beg his forgiveness.

"I understand, dear. The long, long, hours have told it all to me. No! don't ask. Call her now, for I must soon leave you. Love—love is ever impatient."

Winona, turned away wondering to do his bidding. As she passed out of the door, a low moan escaped from his white lips and he suddenly sprang after her with imploring, outstretched arms; but she was gone, and with a shudder his arms dropped again to his side.

When she returned, bringing Belle with her, Adam stood in the middle of the floor rigid and still. His eyes were haggard, and his face was ashen pale but not a muscle of his tense frame quivered.

As Belle met his stern gaze, the blood poured in a flood over her face, and then receded, leaving her white as death.

She tried to greet him naturally, but her voice died in her throat, and her effort met with no response.

"Miss Stillwater," said Adam, in a steady, pitiless voice, "I regret to face any woman with the accusation which is upon my lips, but justice demands it. The shameful deceptions which have been practiced by you and yours toward Winona de Monteano must now cease. Let the dead with their errors rest. It is not longer for us to judge them, but you must answer to the truth at last. What devil tempted you to swear to the false oath of Winona's parentage?"

If Adam had retained one doubt of Belle's treachery, that doubt was swept away by the guilt-stricken, baffled look of her face.

She tried for one moment to stem the tide which had turned against her.

"Do you dare accuse me of falsehood?" she stammered, her eyes falling helplessly before him.

"Oh, Adam," cried Winona, her pitiful heart shrinking with sympathetic shame. "You are mistaken. You must be misinformed. Belle has been—I am sure Belle——"

"Stop!" cried Belle fiercely, turning upon her defender with passionate rage. "Do you think I will allow you to plead for me, to stand as defender for any act of mine? What I have done, I have done. I want no tears, or prayers,

or forgiveness of yours ! Why did I do it ? For love. For one look of unconscious tenderness from his eyes, for one work of kindness from his lips, for one moment's pressure of his head upon my breast ! Why did I do it ? To feed the awful hunger of starving hope. To stop the gnawing pangs of despair—to bribe all the hundred fiery fiends of love's desire. Tell it to him. Blazon my shame into his ear, with your head upon his breast. I am glad it has come to this at last. I am glad ! glad ! glad ! If your yellow hair had blazed like a scorching sun into my eyes much longer, I might have blotted it out in sudden hate and fury, then the world would have been dark to him, and in spite of my hate, I should have wept to see him."

With a cry of horror and dismay, Winona shrank away, but Adam sprang toward the swaying figure, crying hoarsely, "Oh Belle, I was too cruel ! I understand now ! I know, I know !"

But with a repellent gesture she turned fiercely away and fled from the room.

"Adam, Adam, what is it ?" cried Winona, clinging fearfully to his arm.

"It is all explained now, Winona. I found the letter telling of your birth, giving your mother's name. Where is it ? Do not ask. In the madness of my sorrow and despair, I was no longer master of myself. Ah, what am I that I should judge her !"

Taking the clinging hands from his arm, he folded and fondled them in his own, then pressed them for one moment against his beating heart.

"Winona there is one outside who also loves you. It is right that he should love you, for the mystery has been cleared away. No, don't start so, Winona, don't grow so

pale! Leave the pallor of sickening heart-throbs to despair!—Is it true? Yes, I swear by the Most High Name that it is true.—No, no! One moment! Only one moment for me!”

She stopped, stricken with a sudden blinding force of spiritual light,—the light of a noble soul revealed. With half-dazed awe she gazed into his quivering face, into the suffering eyes that seemed to hold for one fleeting moment the man’s whole life and consciousness.

A long, sobbing sigh escaped from her throbbing breast. With a power she could neither understand nor hinder, a revelation of greater things than she had known swept over her. She looked into this man’s eyes a child, she looked fearfully away from him, a woman.

Love, young, beautiful, confident, expectant Love had won her,—her childish heart had flown into his bosom content. Now her woman’s soul, born of the travail of the hour, beheld Love a chastened thing, hopeless, self-crucified for her. The deathly-white face and luminous eyes into which she gazed were transfigured with heavenly beauty before her blurred vision.

“Adam!” she whispered. “Adam!”

He seemed not to have heard. The life which had concentrated in his fixed glowing eyes would not be recalled to his white lips.

She dropped her face in her hands with a low cry of painful emotion.

The half articulate sound recalled Adam to himself. The strange light faded from his face. With a stifled sigh of stern self-repression and command, he turned away, and with hand upon the door-knob said dully, “Good-bye, Winona. He is here.”

She sprang toward him and tried to speak, but the words died in her throat. She could only gasp, with a convulsive effort, "Adam!"

But he smiled a strange smile and shook his head. "Don't mind me, Winona, I will not detain you."

He pushed open the door. At the signal, a young man sprang eagerly past him, and Wilton's outstretched arms opened like a haven of rest to the one he loved.

"Winona!" he cried, "my darling! mine again at last, at last!"

But she flung out her arms before her as if to hold him back, and cried once more in a piercing voice—"Adam!"

Wilton fell back amazed, wounded, chagrined. A flood of color swept over his face and his arms dropped heavily. In answer to her call, Adam turned his pallid face once more toward her, but took no backward steps.

Quick as thought, she sprang past her wondering lover, and clasping Adam's hand in both her own dragged him back into the room.

Her eyes glowed with a strange light, a bright red spot burned upon her cheeks, and her breath came fast, as the words rushed from her lips.

"Wilton, Wilton, do you know what he has done? Do you realize what a noble thing love may be? Before this man's larger soul what an ignoble thing is our poor passion!—my love, which would have taken advantage of his unselfishness!—your love which in its weakness deceived yourself and me! A vision of a greater life has burst upon my soul to-day. Wilton, I have loved you! God knows I do love you! My heart of yesterday cried out, 'Come back to me, only come back, and in your weakness I will but love you the more!' My soul to-day cries more entreatingly still, 'Come back,

but bring to me a nobler love, a higher conception of life and its true meaning.' ”

She stopped, panting, still clasping Adam's hand in her quivering palms.

“Winona, you are beside yourself,” faltered Adam, trying gently to draw away his hand. “Your sudden joy has unnerved you. Compose yourself,” and he laid his free hand soothingly upon her bright hair.

Wilton sprang toward them with a hoarse cry. He caught the doctor's wrist and flung the caressing hand away.

“Winona, look at me!” he cried! “You are under an evil spell! You laud this man for his noble soul. What has he done? He has swept your true heart from its allegiance! He has stolen your love from me! God! how you make me suffer!—and before him! Choose, choose now between us! Call back your reason and your own true heart, back from this man's evil power. Winona, my darling, come back to yourself before it is too late! He stole your love, and has brought me here to see it. He paid me for my loss in coin, in the hard cash of a dead man's gains.”

“Stop! Wilton, think! For shame's sake do not upbraid and slander him. You are unjust! You are cruel! I cannot choose between you now. I will never choose while there is a spark of enmity between you! Wilton, you are not yourself. You must, you will see clearer in time. Don't part in anger. Don't leave me to despair. How can we plight our troth again, before the new-born souls of manhood and womanhood have had time to live, to know themselves and each other! Have you not will and strength for this, dear Wilton?”

“God give me will and strength to go!” cried Wilton, his voice quivering with passion. “I came here to do homage

to a noble soul. I find, in the guise of benefactor, he has been enemy and traitor. I have no words of reproach for you. May God keep you from seeing clearer when too late! Can it indeed be that this is the end—the end for which we have suffered so long? I can only say then, Farewell and God protect you!”

He turned dizzily to the door. With a swift, noiseless step Winona barred his passage, and laying a trembling hand upon his arm said huskily, “Wilton, it lies with you,—and your future life.”

His white lips quivered, but he did not pause.

Adam turned to follow him, but Wilton cried sternly to him, “Not yet; wait till distance and safety lies between us. Revenge is only cured by time and space.”

Winona heard the words, and laid a detaining hand upon Adam’s arm. She held him there until Wilton was out of sight, then said chokingly, “Adam, I cannot say more to you now. Go back to your home, and know that a grateful heart and appreciative soul go with you.”

Taking his hand once more in hers, she leaned forward till her brow touched his lips, then hastened away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WILTON reached home, mad with jealousy and passion. He hurried to his room and locked himself in. Solitude cooled his anger and cleared his brain. He began to think. An hour later he loathed himself. His eyes were opened to the unreasoning jealousy which unsuspected, had been a dominating trait in his short life.

The longer he thought, the lower sank his self-respect and pride. The picture of himself, as he stood with his jealous selfish soul bared before Winona's gaze, filled him with a helpless frenzy of shame. Why had he been so blind! How he had misjudged her! Her nobler soul had responded grandly to a noble deed, his had been dull and craven before it. How had he answered her pleading for response to the newborn spiritual conception of their love? By cowardly crinations, by dull comprehension, by shameful slander of one who was as far above him as heaven is above earth.

Wilton's cup of shame and remorse was full. He drank it to the dregs, and the nauseous draught sickened him body and soul. Oh, that life would present some opportunity which would retrieve his fallen honor, cleanse his dragged self-respect. Never would he appear to Winona again till he felt himself once more a man,—never,—never, though his absence seal the doom of his hopes. Never again would he plead his love till the sentiment in his heart would compel respect like to that she had felt for a nobler man than he.

Life was no longer a thing to be enjoyed, but to be lived. Even the longing of his humbler love was not stronger than this new passion for a deeper, broader, higher life.

Wilton did not sleep that night, nor the next. The long anxiety over his fateful secret, the shock of its disclosure, the despair of its results, the sudden hope and joy, the fierce disappointment, and lastly the sickening shame and remorse, were all having their dire effect upon his health. He could not work. A dull languor and mental apathy seized his faculties, yet rest and sleep would not come to him. During the long hours of the night a gnawing pain tugged at the base of his brain, and his half-closed eyes seemed to look into the faces of demons lurking in corners and gliding about his bed.

He was silent alike about his troubles and his health, but Aunt Milly's watchful eyes grew anxious and distressed. She did not wish to intrude upon his secret thoughts, but when she could bear it no longer, she put her motherly arms about his neck and wept over him.

He soothed her with affectionate solicitude, choking back the emotion which her sweet sympathy made almost overwhelming. But the good woman had her way, and Wilton promised to go once more up to the old farm, for a week's rest.

Aunt Milly watched his departure with mingled pleasure and foreboding. Her apprehension proved not to be without cause, for he had not been three days away, when a telegram confirmed her fears :—"Wilton has come down with typhoid fever."

Aunt Milly made hurried preparations for departure, and the early morning found her on her way to the patient's bedside.

When Winona found herself once more alone, her thoughts, of necessity, turned to practical things.

She could not stay longer under the roof with Belle. Further intercourse between them was out of the question. She accordingly made preparations to board with a family that had long shown a deep interest in her welfare.

Three days later found her comfortably settled in her new home. Fortunately, she had not met Belle. As soon as the wretched girl found that her schemes had failed, she went immediately to her father's sister for protection, knowing that Winona would not, under any circumstances, remain long in the house.

After a week had passed, Winona dispatched a little note to Wilton, acquainting him with her whereabouts. To Adam, also, she explained fully the change in her circumstances, for Adam had been for some time unrestricted manager of her property and affairs.

It was well that Winona had these necessary diversions, for her mind and heart were in a sore conflict over all the happenings of the past months. But her soul had taken deeper root into things both temporal and spiritual, and she did not sink under her severe trials and disappointments, as once she might have done. She would bide her time, live true to her newly-awakened conceptions, and await whatever life had yet in store for her. It was only at night, when she was quiet and alone, that the old longing, yearning love for Wilton came back to her, unchanged and unsubdued. In her heart she forgave him for every deception toward herself, for every cruel word he had spoken in his jealous passion, but she was sorry neither for her words or actions in that last meeting. Her heart craved a nobler love. If Wilton were indeed the man of her ideal, of her devotion,

he would one day measure up to that nobler love which had been exemplified to them both. Till then, she must wait and hope, and live.

Winona had first thought that she would leave her new address at the old home. If Wilton called for her, it was then time enough to let him know her whereabouts. But she thought of the lost letter which had caused them both so much sorrow, and reconsidered her decision. She would not trust to a message which, even though left with the maid, might pass through Belle's hands. So she swallowed her pride, and took the initiative between them by sending a note to Wilton's office address.

As the days went by and she received no reply, the new womanly strength and dignity of her character had a hard and bitter fight for life. But strength comes of action, and Winona grew daily in womanly grace and beauty.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ADAM thought that his bitter struggle between love and conscience had ended when he confessed to Winona that no barrier existed between her heart and Wilton's.

Her words in reply and Wilton's unlooked-for action, had opened up another path for baffled hope, and do what he would, that unconquered spirit loitered ever at the entrance of a brighter world.

Every little note, no matter how business-like, brought, first a chill of dread, and then a warm glow, to his unchanging heart.

Winona said nothing of Wilton; yet, somehow, he knew that she would not keep him in a torture of suspense if there were anything to tell him. At last one little note said with unconscious pathos, "I hear nothing from Wilton." That was all, but it made Adam's heart bound with a feeling of mingled joy and pain. Could it be possible that the boy had held the wonderful boon of her love so lightly as to part with it for a jealous pang and an unreasonable distrust? He could scarcely believe it, and his heart burned with shame for him. But he knew that the love of the average man is fickle indeed, and it might be that it was for him, after all, to satisfy the higher cravings of her maturer life. Her lover's fickleness once proved, God forbid that she should waste a further tear or pang upon one so unworthy of her.

He answered her note with a tender little message of

sympathy, but with no plea for himself. He had waited so many years. He would wait patiently, yet a little longer.

He found it hard to work with so much uncertainty hanging over him. Fortunately, it was coming spring, and many of his patients were finding their way north again.

One afternoon brought him a call to Sergeant W——, an old comrade who had been garrisoned at Fort Marion with him, and who had since returned south, holding a commission to guard the deserted stronghold.

The dampness of the coquina walls, which even the blazing wood fire of his quarters could not quite dispel, laid the rheumatic soldier liable to many attacks of pain and helplessness.

The rain was falling from a leaden sky in a dull, heavy downpour as Adam started out in response to the call. But the doctor was not accustomed to consult the weather.

The old fort held many vivid memories, and Adam never crossed the bridge spanning the moat without a rush of strange reflections. Absorbed in his thoughts, he did not notice an uncouth figure skulking in the angle of the barbican wall, but passed through the sally-port holding his dripping umbrella close over his head.

Entering the guard-room he lost no time in ministering to his patient. The sick soldier was gloomy and taciturn. The day had been long and lonely. The old fortress made a sorry hospital after the drenching storm had driven away the chattering crowd of sight seers. The rain falling in the court echoed and re-echoed against the solid walls and casemates, till a perfect pandemonium of ceaseless sounds fretted the sick man's ears.

"Here doctor," he said, querulously, "do an old comrade a favor. I left a case of spirits in the narrow passage lead-

ing to the dungeon. I've lain here parched for a drop all day and no one to get it for me. Take these keys ; you know the place. Through the furthest casemate into the dark chamber. The narrow passage between the dark chamber and the dungeon."

Adam took the proffered keys, and raising his umbrella as he struck the open, cheerfully crossed the echoing court on his errand of ministry.

As he turned the key in the casemate door, a figure glided out of an opposite barrack, crossed the court with muffled feet and slipped in after him. The slim build, the skulking gait, the small, square, coarse-bearded face under the dripping slouch-rimmed hat, are all too familiar. It was Tim Tramner.

As the doctor passed from the casemate into the dark chamber, he lighted a tallow candle which the sergeant had put into his hand. While he was thus engaged, Tim crept cautiously in after him. For a moment the two men stood there, one, unconscious of evil, absorbed in his innocent task, the other crouching with weapon in hand, every tense muscle ready for a murderous spring. A sudden movement of Adam's body, only half visible in the uncertain light, made the waiting villain shrink hastily into a dark corner, near the opening. He would wait there in safety and stab to the death as his victim passed out.

Unconscious of the fell fiend behind him, standing with poised dagger of murderous hate, Adam squeezed through the narrow passage and presently found that for which he searched. He lifted a bottle free from its straw covering and came back once more into the dark chamber. As he walked, he held his candle carefully in front of him.

A crouching figure pressed close in the angle of the mouldy

wall felt a cold terror, lest the flickering flame cast its rays over him, and discover him to the terrors of a hand-to-hand struggle in the darkness.

But Adam did not glance about him, he made his way carefully to the door, shielding the sickly flame with his hand. He stood at last but a few feet from light and safety.

The waiting demon clinched his weapon. It poised quivering in the air. At that instant, a gust from the open door swept the flame from its slender hold upon the wick. Adam swerved quickly to shield it, and the fierce blow cut the empty air with a sharp hiss, while a stifled, convulsive aspiration, like the snort of an animal smote upon Adam's startled ear.

He took three terrified strides to the door, and breathed deeply, as he stumbled into the light. For one moment he stood gazing into the darkness, but seeing nothing, laughed nervously at himself for his unreasoning fears. But his nerves were well-shaken by the sudden terror, so much so, that he brought the bottle and the keys and delivered them without a word to the waiting sergeant, forgetting that he had neglected to lock again the casemate door.

He said nothing to his patient that might make the gloomy fortress more depressing, and presently took his leave.

The cheerful stimulus of the outside air soon banished all but a passing amused memory of his fright in the dark chamber under the fortress walls.

CHAPTER XL.

THE strange silence which had caused Winona so many days and nights of deep anxiety and distress, was at last broken.

A letter in an unfamiliar handwriting lay one morning upon her desk. She opened it listlessly, but when she turned it over and saw the signature "Aunt Milly" her indifference vanished instantly. The missive was short and read as follows :

"DEAR WINONA :—

"I beg you will pardon this intrusion upon your private affairs, but interest in one so well beloved as Wilton sweeps away hindrances which otherwise might seem too great to overlook.

"Wilton is just convalescent from a long and dangerous run of typhoid fever. Through all his delirium he talked of you. For reasons which you will understand, we did not send for you. When at last the crisis was past, and he was able to explain to us that the strange barrier which had come between you had been broken down forever, our joy and gratitude knew no bounds. What, then, was our amazement and grief when he refused to let us send for you, saying hopelessly that he was not worthy of you, that he had no claim upon your consideration.

"We cannot know what has transpired to make him hold

this, to us, astonishing conviction ; but I at least, can bear it no longer in silence. I therefore write, believing that if I have done wrong, you will know how to pardon the love and anxiety which prompted it.

“ Affectionately yours,

“ AUNT MILLY.”

Winona's emotions over this letter were a fit indication of what she had suffered in silence. She laughed and sobbed by turns as she hastily packed her satchel, and hurried to the station for the first train to B——.

The old accommodation engine had been replaced by a swift express, but to Winona's eager, strained nerves it seemed to crawl like a laggard past the lines of bare telegraph poles.

But the little station at last glided into view and Winona's heart beat almost to suffocation as she thought that between herself and Wilton there was only that ride under the maple trees, the swift trot past the spreading meadows, the slow climbing to the brow of the hill, and finally, the rapid run down the long descent, past the old graveyard, over the murmuring brook, and up again the sharp knoll to the broad horse-block.

How vividly she remembered it all !

She was soon seated in the little buggy beside Father Bearall's farmer, and in another moment was on her way to *him*.

It was early April. The trees and the meadows showed their first tinge of summer green, and the chill spring air was full of the indescribable perfumes, and mysterious pulsations of bursting life.

Winona was left much to her own thoughts, for the young

farmer was shy of the city visitor, and as they rapidly passed each familiar object, her heart was filled with smiles and her eyes with tears.

Farmer Bearall stood there to receive her, a solitary figure in the deepening dusk. Thus he had stood, his wife and Wilton beside him, when so long ago she had first caught a glimpse of his kindly face. Her eyes brimmed over. How changed he was, how bowed and feeble, how snowy white his thin locks.

She sprang out of the buggy, too impatient to wait for a helping hand, hesitated one moment, then threw her arms around the old man's neck and kissed him.

"I'm so glad you've got here at last," he exclaimed in a quivering voice. "I allus said the little yellow-haired gal was a likely little lass spite of her outlandish name, an' common sense taught me that you couldn't go back on a boy like our Wilton, for no ordinary reason. It just drove my old heart crazy to have him talkin' so tender like and callin', Winona, Winona, as if he could never stop, and we all the time thinkin' that it would only make it ten times worse to send for you 'cause of that awful twisted up pedigree!"

The old man stopped out of breath and choking. Winona's tears fell on his rough coat-sleeve as she clung to his arm, and said with a sob,—“And all the time I was wondering where he was, and praying that I might hear from him.”

“Thank the Lord, thank the Lord, that has made that twisted pedigree come out all right, as I allus said it would.”

Aunt Milly met her at the door and kissed her tenderly, whispering, “We haven't told him, Winona. We were afraid the anxious expectancy might throw him into a fever. He is still very weak.”

Winona nodded assent, her throat too full of choking tears to speak.

Aunt Milly had turned the little parlor into a bedroom. She led Winona softly to the door. The invalid's eyes were too weak to stand a bright light, and the evening candles had been withheld as long as possible. As the patient's quick ear caught the sound of footsteps, he said anxiously. "Is that you, Aunt Milly? Please bring the candles. It is so lonely in the dark."

"I have brought you stolen sunshine, Wilton, you will not need candles."

"Oh, Aunt Milly, don't speak in riddles," said Wilton in the slightly fretful tone of an invalid. "If you have sunshine for me it must, indeed, be stolen."

Winona glided softly forward, and following the sound of his voice dropped quietly by the side of his bed.

The slight rustle of her garments caught his ear, and putting out his hand in a startled way he cried excitedly,

"What! who! Why, Aunt Milly, what does this mean?"

"Wilton, my love, my dear love," murmured Winona, arresting the searching hand and pressing it against her throbbing heart, "I have come."

A trembling cry of joy quivered through the room. "Winona! O Winona!"—and Aunt Milly, choking down her sobs of sympathy and joy, hastened from the room.

As she told the story, her old father first brushed the tears away with the back of his trembling hand, then blew his nose with the force and suddenness of a foghorn. His wife, sitting opposite, suddenly slipped the next stitch on her knitting needles as though he had once again caught her nodding over his reading.

It seemed as though the two young hearts would never

exhaust the stores of their inmost thoughts. The name most frequently upon their lips was that of "Adam Links." It seemed to Wilton that he could never explain to Winona the depths of his shame and contrition over his treatment of that noble man.

"I must write to him, Wilton," said Winona, one day "I have put it off as long as I could. How sad a fate it seems that made his great heart go out to one unable to return his love! How cruel the necessity that I, myself, should cut the last thread of his hope."

Wilton was silent, the problem was too deep, too mysterious for words.

By and by he said gently, "Winona, when you write, you will tell him how much of remorse I have suffered for wronging him, what a revelation and inspiration his noble character has been to me—to both of us."

"I will tell him as well as I can," replied Winona sadly, "but the truth in its fullness he can never know."

CHAPTER XLI.

It was evening, and Adam sat in his library. He had waited long and pondered deeply. At last his mind was made up. He would write the letter to Winona which would once more plead his love.

As he sat thinking, a tender light swept over his face. He suddenly rose and taking up a small hand-lamp, ascended the stairs.

His footsteps went softly down an unused corridor, and stopped in front of a locked door. He took out his keys and fitting one new and bright into the lock, presently swung open the door and entered.

Placing the lamp upon a table, he struck a match, and presently the apartment was under a flood of light from a sparkling glass chandelier pendant from the ceiling.

Adam moved softly about as though the four enclosing walls contained a sacred shrine. The room was draped in pale blue and gold, soft, shimmering, dainty. Every article told of a loving discrimination and forethought. Adam drew a long sigh of tender satisfaction and delight. It was a fit dwelling for the enshrined queen of his heart. From the boudoir, he passed into the dainty bedchamber, this time white and gold. His eye swept over this picture also, but did not linger long. It seemed almost as though he were taking a liberty in her absence, so he gently closed the door.

Then he went into the room which had been partly arranged

for the toilette. Everything here was unfinished, just as the workmen had left it after the discovery of the hidden cabinet. The plumbers had been puzzled by the abrupt order to quit work, but they had only grumbled to themselves, "I suppose that queer doctor must know his business."

Adam's face grew shadowed and mournful as he stood looking at the unfinished work, but presently he raised his head and drew a deep breath as if shaking off foreboding,—and turned away.

He only waited a moment longer, then giving a last lingering glance about the rooms, passed out, carefully locking the door after him.

A moment later found him again in the library.

He replaced the lamp upon the table, seated himself in his study chair, and for a brief space abandoned himself to his thoughts. Then he took up his pen and wrote.

"MY DEAR WINONA :—

"I have just been through the rooms which were so nearly completed for your dear use. I have tried to control my gnawing impatience, and have partially succeeded until now. But there comes a time when the heart must take its fate in its hands and reveal its secrets, for Time or for Eternity. Be it for Time, or be it only for Eternity, to you, beloved Winona, my heart has gone out. There is but this one thing for me. If it is to be mine in Time, then what is there for me but to take my fate in my hands and plead my undying love. If rather for Eternity, then have I lost nothing by my prayer, for some day I, even I, shall be satisfied."

Adam's face was very pale as the pen dropped from his fingers, and he started as he heard Pompey's knock outside.

The old negro responded to his "come in" and closing the door after him said timidly, "Sorry to disturb you, sah, but there be a patient waitin' for you in de hall. He's a sorry lookin' chap, but he wouldn't go 'way no how!"

"Very well, Pompey," replied Adam absently. "Just wait a moment and mail this letter for me. Be sure you make no mistake now. I'll see the fellow presently."

Adam carefully folded and directed the letter, and held it out to Pompey who received, it muttering plaintively,

"Can't see why you tell old Pompey to be keerful, of you' letters. Ain't I allus been mighty partic'lar 'bout you special bizness, Mars Adam?"

"That you have, Pompey," assented Adam heartily. "I suspect I owe half my success to you, so don't get your old head askew and your heart out of tune by a little thing like that."

Pompey hobbled out, his black, wrinkled face shining with satisfaction.

For a few moments after Pompey left, Adam walked nervously about the room, as though uncertainty in regard to the wisdom of his action was already beginning to weigh heavily upon him. Then he ran his fingers through his hair, buttoned up his coat and throwing back his shoulders went out through the hall into his little office.

He found the room empty and looked about in a puzzled way. Then he remembered that Pompey said the patient was waiting in the hall. But he had seen no one.

He stepped to the doorway and looked up and down. No one in sight.

"He must have gone," thought Adam, with a sigh of relief, and started to cross the hall once more to the peace and quiet of his library.

As he passed under the glare of the hall globe, a slim villainous figure sprang from the shadow of the stairway. There was the gleam of a weapon, a startled cry "Tim!" a heavy fall, and the murderer sprang over the prostrate figure, through the door, and out into the darkness. Then a quietness like death settled over the house, broken only by the loud ticking of the library clock.

A few moments later, Pompey, having proudly returned from his errand, hobbled slowly from the kitchen precincts to close the doors for the night.

He gave a piercing shriek of terror, grief and rage as he almost stumbled over the prostrate body of his beloved master.

In a moment the house was in confusion. Neighbors had been summoned and messengers dispatched for help.

Adam was tenderly lifted from the floor and carried into his study, but the still look of death was upon his face. He never spoke again.

The doctor summoned in such haste only shook his head hopelessly. One by one the shocked neighbors and friends dropped silently and sadly away. Again the house was quiet.

Adam lay as if asleep upon his study couch. The loud-ticking clock kept him company as it had so many times before. But its ceaseless tick fell upon deaf ears, the doctor would never need its services again.

A sound of smothered weeping was heard outside the door, then it slowly opened and poor old Pompey, shaken with a paroxysm of stifled sobs, crossed the room to where his master lay.

He held a letter in his hand. And as he laid it softly upon the table, he faltered out. "Poor old Pompey 'll do

his duty to the last, but you won't never read it now, never read it now."

The letter was in a woman's handwriting, and the postmark was that of the little village of B——.

Pompey turned away, half crazed with grief, knowing not the kindness of a Providence that had spared his beloved master the reading.

THE END.



